The Productivity of Multicultural Teams

What is the influence of national cultural diversity?

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Abstract

This thesis aims to provide a better understanding of how teamwork is affected by different cultures that have various value sets, assumptions, beliefs, and norms. Multicultural teams are an essential part of today’s global business environment. These teams are composed of members from different nationalities with diversified ways of perceiving the world by their cultural makeups. There is an extensive amount of literature covering this cultural area. Here different theories have contributed to the concept of culture by recognizing the complexity of its multilayered nature. Other cultural tools are also utilized in order to obtain an understanding of the similarities and differences existing in cultures.

In creating a theoretical investigation of multicultural teamwork there is a need to examine how teamwork is affected in relation to potential productivity of a team, the advantages and disadvantages. The potential productivity can be measured in terms of the performance of the team and to what degree the team is effective. Furthermore, the teamwork is dependent on the team task and the different stages of the group work process. The drawbacks of multicultural teamwork amount from miscommunication due to the increased misunderstandings arising from having various nationals working together. Other negative forces consist of decreased team cohesiveness, perception issues, and the absence of cultural self-awareness. In addition, literature concludes that multicultural teams have a greater potential to reach a higher level of productivity than homogenous teams. The features that make multicultural teams highly attractive are their increased creativity, variety of skills, and their ability to suit different market needs etc.

The empirical results are in this thesis gathered by use of online interviewing, which is a methodological development and new trend in qualitative research. We created e-mail interviews in order to grasp a wide population across borders, ranging from members who worked for a short period of time in multicultural teams to people highly experienced with such teams. Responses from people with a broad background of experiences resulted in an extensive data treatment process by the usage of different analytical tools. After this process, a concluding presentation of our findings will show the various ways teamwork is affected by having culturally diverse team members. Some findings are in accordance with theories and some show different interesting patterns experienced in practice by our respondents.

Keywords: Multicultural teams, culture, diversity, multinational teamwork, team productivity
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1. INTRODUCTION

Current trends of the contemporary business world are highly associated with the continuous globalization of the economy. These trends include a growing number of international corporations, strong forces of global economic competition, constant flow of across borders business transactions and an increasing divergence within the workforce. All these are trends are contributing to a complex business environment that forces organizations to be progressively more active and competitive. The factor that allows companies to survive in such difficult non-permanent surroundings is their ability for effective adaptation to the change. This adaptation is often driven by cultural diversity (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009). Adapting to cultural diversity in this rapidly modernized world is a demanding process, since culture is still much slower to change. Mastering the ability to interact with different cultures is thereby an important device for future business success (C. Thomas & Inkson 2004).

There can be identified two sources that are conductive to the existence of cultural diversity in organizations. The first is derived from global changes in transportation, technology and trade that lead to increased human mobility. People relocate around the world for many different reasons as immigrants, temporary workers, retirees, visitors etc. Another factor that contributes to this inflow of new members to communities is the increase of free trade agreements, bilateral treaties and opened borders. Full-time education abroad, exchange programs, international seminars are increasingly popular among students and their worldwide experience is often highly valued by future employers. This multinational environment creates cultural pluralism within societies (Schmidt, Conaway, Easton and Wardrope 2007). Cultural pluralism explains how diverse human capital exists in nationally-operating companies, since the reality of the multicultural workforce is independent of those organizations. The second source of diversity is raised in companies by their high involvement in increasing multiculturalism. Global organizations are gradually employing more multinationals purposely due to the benefits they can bring to a company. One of the tasks that come from business globalization is “the ability of a corporation to take a product and market it in other countries” (Schmidt, Conaway, Easton and Wardrope 2007: 7). This forces companies to widen their horizons and look for demand drivers in other markets. Adapting into another economy is easier to convey while working with multinationals coming from these particular countries. Today’s business environment is ever changing; companies are continuously altering their strategies to maintain their level in the industry. An example of this is that companies are increasingly
following the trend of using outsourcing of their operations to other countries. This strategic choice opens doors to multicultural team-work at all levels.

Multicultural teams as showed above have become a part of organizations as a strategic and structural element in global businesses. These teams are created in many different job profiles and organizational structures from the tasks involving physical work-teams up to top management teams (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). Business sectors incorporating teams as part of their working environment include private and public sectors; industrial, military and governmental organizations (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009). There are many examples of multinational corporations where teams are part of the organizational structure formed to meet the challenges of emerging market needs. These examples include Marriott creating a multicultural team to fulfill international assessment of some of their hotel chains; Royal Dutch’s Shell achieved their oil-discovery method thanks to their multicultural teams; while Ernst & Young gained insights on different accounting practices worldwide by employing a multinational team (Matveev & Milter 2004). These are only examples of the great potential multicultural teams provide the companies with. The existence of multicultural team-work used by organizations is already an important and evolving trend.

As organizations are highly multicultural in today’s business environment, the necessity to handle and effectively work with culturally different people has become increasingly important. Globalization has contributed to opening doors of possibilities for organizations, but in the same time added great complexity and challenges for them when operating in these cross-cultural surroundings. These complexities can be seen from different cultures emerging together to cooperate around mutual goals. Multicultural teams are exposed to different national cultures, norms, attitudes and behaviors that influence each individual team member.

Our main motivation for writing this thesis is that we believe culturally diverse surroundings are the future for many organizations. Multicultural teams are an important part of this environment. Even though, such teams are known phenomena, they are becoming increasingly popular and organizations continuously see greater potential but also problems by using these teams. Therefore we became inquisitive of this topic and decided to investigate the concept of national culture and how it affects behaviors in a team. Literature shows that empirical work investigating the influence cultures have on the
team functioning has just begun to appear (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009). Therefore, this new way of exploring the effect of cultures on teamwork is an interesting topic. The importance of the concept of multicultural teams is unavoidable as they are a vital part of future organizations. This is clear as Salas, Goodwin and Burke state “not only is cultural team research needed to expand the state of the art; it is also becoming an ever more critical topic as the prevalence of multicultural teams in organizations increases” (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009: 534). The multinational teamwork is not just one of many working approaches, but what defines uniqueness of such work is the cultural influence coming from team members. This cultural impact differentiates nationally diverse teams from any other types of teams, and is an unavoidable part of such teamwork. “If we accept the idea that the globalization and international integration of companies is inevitable, then business and its study are at crossroads of understanding. It is no longer acceptable to proceed with the study of teams as if its members are isolated from their cultural and national heritage (Earley & Gibson 2002: xv).” This statement shows the importance of national cultural diversity as an essential part of diverse teams. Based on the foregoing, this thesis intention is to investigate:

**How does (national) cultural diversity influence multicultural teamwork?**

The investigation of this problem statement will be supported by relevant theories and frameworks. They will serve as the base for an increased understanding of the relation between national diversity and teamwork. After presenting these theories, we will carry out a qualitative research to examine how national diversity affects teamwork. This research will be directed to professionals with valued experience working in multicultural teams. Their responses will be analyzed and compared to our presented theoretical base. This will furthermore allow us to reach the key issues and factors contributing to a concluding solution to our problem statement.

**2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**2.1. Conceptualizations: Team, Diversity, Culture**

As the problem statement is to examine the relation of cultural diversity to teamwork, there is a need for specific explanations of terms involved in order to gain an overview of the scope of the topic.
Team

For a better understanding of the essence of the subject, the starting point is the definition of a team. Scientific literature presents many interpretations towards defining a team. One characterization formulated by Katzenbach and Smith states that “a team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (Brooks 2006: 84). A more comprehensive clarification has been presented by Bailey and Cohen, where “a team is a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and are seen by others as an intact social entity, embedded in one or more larger social systems and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries” (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008: 4). Both of these definitions underline the interdependence of team members as individuals who bring their unique skills and working approaches to the team, as well as the complex social system that is built by the team members.

Usually under the definition of a team, particular time frames and specific resources are mentioned as parts of teamwork limitations. Those resources include time, money, people, material, information, social capital and energy. All these resources are the factors that have a major impact on the productivity of a team (Adler 2008). The processes that group members are involved in relate to the actual actions taken by individuals or the entire group when solving a task. They include approaches, both on interpersonal and intrapersonal levels in order to transform the resources they have into products or services.

Aside from different definitions of a team, there are also several typologies of team categorization. Some of them are the differentiation between formal and informal teams. Formal teams tend to have strong organizational structures where team members have distinct roles and specified workload. Those teams are often set for a particular task to be accomplished within a specific timeframe. On the contrary, informal teams are usually created to solve a particular problem, but during their work there is a possibility of membership changes. The level of interdependence in informal teams is lower as compared to formal teams (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). Other types of teams are task forces, committees, self-managed and virtual teams. Task forces are teams designed for a specific project within the organization, where the performance and timetable together with members’ interdependence play the
most important role. A committee performs likewise to task forces, but the degree of members’ autonomy is higher with different levels of interdependence. Self-managed teams have the greatest level of sovereignty from the organization. Virtual teams do not have to meet in the physical form of face-to-face in order to work; their formation and participation take place by the means of technology. While the definitions of those team types are clearly expressed, it is possible that the features of one team characteristics overlap with another team type or types (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). Teams can differ in terms of projects they are involved in; these types of projects can be related to product design, strategy formulation, marketing planning etc. Those projects can last temporarily where teams are formed for short-term periods, whereas some teams function in the organization for years. Teams can be composed of members that have never met before, while other teams consist of members that already have some experiences together prior to the team formation, or they even choose team members themselves. Teams can also be categorized in terms of diversity. There are several types of such teams: homogenous teams where all members come from the same background, token teams in which only one member comes from other surroundings, bicultural teams where two cultures are represented and multicultural teams. This thesis will investigate the diversity in multicultural teams that contain members of three or more national backgrounds.

To look further into the meaning of a multicultural team, a deeper investigation of this term is carried out. Having a team membership of several different nationalities within the team is a factor differentiating heterogeneous teams from homogenous teams. Furthermore “a multinational team, in contrast to teams from a single culture, entails differences among members in language, interpersonal styles, and a host of other factors. Such differences can create a balance (cohesion and unity) or an imbalance (subgroup dominance, member exclusion, and other undesirable outcomes), depending on how they are handled” (Shapiro, Glinow and Cheng 2005: 5). Some literature use the term multicultural as culturally diverse but nationally homogenous, however many researchers use these terms interchangeably (Shapiro, Glinow and Cheng 2005). This thesis keeps this assumption of synonym meaning of multinational and multicultural, accounting multicultural as nationally diverse.

Diversity

In understanding the meaning of national diversity, there is a need to look at each component constructing this expression. Diversity refers to people from various groups such as gender, religious
groups, younger and older groups of people, ethnicity and nationality etc. (Guirdham 2005). Nationality is one element of the term diversity. All people in the world can be differentiated by their own nationality. This nationality branch of diversity has elements consisting of clearly observable differences, but also unobservable dissimilarities such as the value systems people hold, skills, experience and cognitive processes. Furthermore, these two types of diversity can be categorized into the surface-level diversity with clearly visible traits and the other diversity being the more deep-leveled diversity, with no clearly identified traits (Staples & Zhao 2006). In a multicultural team setting, these two forms of diversity play an important role in determining the process and outcome of national diverse teams. Govindarajan and Gupta further explore these two forms of dividing diversity, as they state two types of diversity closely related to the previous ones. These are cognitive and behavioral diversity. The cognitive diversity refers to “the differences in the substantive content of how people perceive the team’s challenges and opportunities, options to be evaluated and optimal course of action” (Francesco & Gold 2005:67). This deals with different perceptions people hold, meaning that individuals have different ways to perceive the task and optimal solutions in the group work. The other form is behavioral diversity referring to the various group members where there is a “difference in language as well as culture-driven norms of behavior” (Francesco & Gold 2005: 67). This refers to how different cultural norms can create communication difficulties and how they determine the behavior of people (Francesco & Gold 2005).

Culture

To obtain an understanding of what national cultural diversity indicates, it is important to examine the definition of culture. The term culture is complex, as there are more than one hundred sixty definitions of it (Thomas 2008). An example of these multiple representations of the concept culture can be seen as Triandis states “culture as the subjective perception of the human-made part of the environment” (Thomas 2008: 27). Here it refers to the terms associated with culture such as beliefs, attitudes, associations etc. This definition also supports Hofstede’s definition governing culture, as he expresses it by being “the collective software of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede 2005: 3). This software includes the patterns of how we behave, think and feel and which is learned throughout a lifetime (Hofstede 2005). Factors that create these patterns stand as the controlling forces of the way people behave and construct their ways of thinking when interacting with others. This supports the argument that culture is a rather complex concept, as it is an ever-changing phenomenon that is highly dynamic and always in flux (Halverson &
Tirmizi 2008). These ever-changing factors refer to the changing world of technology, information and the environment. Furthermore, Smith emphasizes the idea that culture will never be described by a permanent definition as he argues that national cultures are characterized and influenced by many different sources to such a degree that culture cannot be a fixed concept (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). A more recent interpretation of culture is by the definition of Gibson and Gibbs where they define it as “the set of deep-level values associated with societal effectiveness, shared by an identifiable group” (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008: 23). This proves the fact that culture is dynamic and that definitions should be used as working definitions (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

### 2.2. Cultural influences

The linkage between culture, diversity and team

After presenting the basic concepts surrounding our problem formulation, it is possible to see the various ways they can be defined and how we understand them. It has been indicated though, that there are many variations of how people perceive them, as well as the methods for putting them into perspective. It is essential also to see what the connection between them is. In further approaching the complexity of culture it is important to examine the layers culture consists of. Different theories have contributed to this concept of cultural layers, and it has been stated that “understanding culture as a multilevel, multilayered phenomenon is vital to effective sense-making” (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009: 220).

A valuable model for understanding and illustrating how culture is multilayered can be seen from an iceberg model created by Schein. There are three levels used in this division of culture. The part above the surface level represents the cultural artifacts. These are all the visible and tangible features of culture, such as appearance and other noticeable factors. The next level lies just below the surface being the less visible values of culture. These refer to the consciously observed values from the previous level. These values determine the beliefs, attitudes and norms people hold. The last level is the deep level of the basic underlying assumptions, where the core lies at a subconscious level. Here values and actions form a culture’s foundation. They all exist often at a subconscious level, where they are taken for granted by people, as these are their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, etc. As this level is not visible these
issues can easily be overlooked (Thomas 2008). This model shows how cultures are deeply rooted into different layers and therefore caution of misperceptions should be taken when working cross-culturally.

Another important framework for understanding the complexity of culture and how it influences people at different stages can be seen from a model developed by Adler. The model consists of a graphical representation of the different factors that drive people and influence their patterns of behavior.

![Figure 1. Influence of Culture on Behavior and Behavior on Culture (Source: Adapted from Adler 2008: 19)"

The graph shows the influence of culture on behavior and behavior on culture. The values people have in life affect the different attitudes obtained, and create specific behavioral patterns that are observed by people as the most appropriate in any given situation. Groups of people in a society are in the same way as individuals influenced by this circle of culture. Their behaviors are repeatedly changing and will at some point influence the culture of the society. This shows how culture in a society is developed and influenced by people’s behavior. These influences are repeated and therefore they lead to the constant continuation of this cycle (Adler 2008).

2.3. Cultural dimensions

When working across borders an understanding of national cultural differences is essential. These cultural differences are linked to how cultures vary according to their value sets, norms, beliefs and assumptions; and thereby how these guide their behaviors. The terms culture and national culture are often used as interchangeable concepts. In this thesis the terms will be used as similar terms, the
main way they differ is that culture tend to be more general and broader in the definition than the national culture term. National culture refers to how people differentiate across nations and culture relates to differentiating among groups of people. When looking at the major cultural influences, cultural values are seen as powerful forces influencing teams in forms of interpersonal interactions, decision making and to the degree of which a team is seen as effective (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). Therefore creating an understanding of these cultural values is important as a practical guide when dealing with cultures. The complexity of these values is also evident; as for example people in organizations working together sharing the same value dimensions are more likely to have a mutual understanding of expectations and workflow, whereas people working with different value dimensions can pose more significant challenges for organizations (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

In analyzing the value sets cultures hold, different frameworks and researches have contributed to ways of dealing with cultures. These frameworks serve to compare and categorize cultures in order to find similarities and differences. For this thesis comparing and understanding the impact of cultural values is important since these values can be highly influencing team members’ interactions. It is believed that each framework leads to some new understanding of the cultural differences. Looking at some of the most recognized value based frameworks for cultural investigation are Geert Hofstede, Fons Tropenaar and Shalom Schwartz. These cultural frameworks are a significant tool for approaching cultures and important in the understanding of the behavioral dynamics apparent in multicultural teams. The frameworks should be understood as tendencies in cultures and general patterns. Also, it is critical to notice that cultures consist of smaller sub-cultures which might differ. Individuals in societies do not all fall under the same category, as people are different in personality, background etc. (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008: 29).

Hofstede

Geert Hofstede stands for one of the most famous frameworks created from a major cross cultural study in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. He carried out a research based on questionnaires from eighty thousands IBM employees occupying seven different jobs within the organization and from sixty six countries. Hofstede’s research classified almost every country in terms of which cultural tendencies they have; these were indicated by scores up to 100. He determined four values for
understanding how cultures differ across nations. The dimensions established were individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity-femininity (Guirdham 2005).

Individualism-Collectivism refers to how individuals tend to prioritize goals and needs compared to collectivism where the goals and needs are more of a collective concern. The individualistic cultures are more “I” identity focused with concern for personal achievement, personal autonomy and freedom. Collectivist cultures are “we” identity focused and here being loyal to the group is essential. Collectivists make decisions in groups and value security and orders in the organization (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). The “I” identity focuses more on self-sufficiency than the “we” identity, where the obligations to the group has the first priority.

Power distance is defined as to what degree hierarchy and social statuses are acceptable ways of dividing people. Low power distance countries highly support egalitarianism, tend to be concerned with fairness and equal rights, and more flat structured organizations. On the contrary, high power distance exists in hierarchical societies where power is an important force (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). The flat structured organizations refer to the fact that people are more equal across all levels in the organizations, regardless of what positions they hold. The opposite is the hierarchical organization, where people value a pyramid structure with various layers between the lowest and highest positions.

Uncertainty-avoidance refers to how a culture deals with ambiguity and uncertainty. In low uncertainty-avoidance cultures ambiguity is better tolerated and there is less emphasis on rules. Emotions are kept close to people. On the contrary high uncertainty-avoidance refers to cultures where a preference for rules and regulations exists. Those cultures value hard work, look up to experts and in general terms feel a strong need for agreement (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Masculinity-Femininity defines how cultures value role differentiation and to what degree a culture is assertive and performance minded. Masculine cultures are highly differentiated between sex roles and where more masculine values such as being performance driven and independent are essential. The feminine cultures refer to the more feminine values of interdependence where roles are not given according to gender differences. Here softer values of putting emphasis on relationships are important and the quality of life is also essential (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).
Later on, Hofstede identified by doing additional investigation together with a researcher in East Asia, the fifth cultural dimension which is the long-term or short-term time orientation. This dimension refers to what extent cultures have a long-term perspective on tradition and change. Persistence and thrift are emphasized when compared to short-term orientation, where cultures emphasize steadiness and stability (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Hofstede’s research on cultures does not serve the purpose of trying to categorize people’s behavior (Guirdham 2005). Here Hofstede believes that people from the same culture can behave differently by for example in terms of wanting security or rules. Hofstede further argues that not many people can be placed entirely in one cultural pattern, but there are tendencies that appear. Hofstede’s original research carried out in 60’s and 70’s “suggested that 80 percent of the differences in employee’s attitudes and behaviors are influenced by national culture still has resonance today”, meaning that despite his theories being developed many years ago, the patterns still have the same impact on employees as they had forty or fifty years ago (Ochieng & Price 2009).

Fons Tropenaar

Another important value based approach to analyzing culture is by Tropenaar’s dimensions. He conducted an extensive research similar to Hofstede’s, but throughout a ten year period by using a value based questionnaire answered by more than fifteen thousand managers in twenty eight countries. This study has relevance since it also included former east soviet countries not taken into considerations in any previous value based study. This research consists of seven value dimensions created by American sociologists and anthropologists (Kluckholm & Strodtbeck 1961; Parsons & Shils 1951). The dimensions deal with relationships between people and orientations towards time and the environment (Thomas 2008). These dimensions will be summarized in the following paragraphs.

Universalism-Particularism is first of these dimensions to be examined. Universalist cultures are based on rules and procedures that formally help them to form agreements and take actions. At the same time particularistic cultures are not formally driven by rules and procedures, where making decisions depends on the situation (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). For particularism this directs to a more rule based society in determining what is right and also leads to a more rule based business
environment. Particularism deals with a more situational based society where circumstances and relationships determine the rightness.

Individualism-Collectivism is defined in a similar as by Hofstede, where the main emphasis is on personal achievement, personal freedom and goals. Collectivism is more concerned with the needs and goals on a collective basis (Halverson & Tirmizi: 2008).

Specific-Diffuse is related to how people interact in societies in forms of interactions and in communication. Specific cultures tend to be direct and to the point, whereas diffuse cultures are more indirect (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). Here it can be noticed that more indirect cultures do not necessary say what is truly meant, whereas specific cultures might be too straightforward in their approach.

Neutral-Affective defines people’s relationship with emotions. Neutral countries do not visible portray their emotions, as doing so is a signal of weakness indicating a lack of self-control. They try not to reveal their feelings and thoughts and also avoid physical contact. Affective cultures are more open in their relationship with emotions and more often physically interact with others (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). This could lead to a conclusion that people from neutral societies can be challenged when it comes to working multiculturally, as they appear to be more emotionally detached. Affective cultures may be easier to cooperate with, as they are more transparent and easier to interpret throughout team work when tensions occur as they carry their feelings on the outside.

Achievement-Ascription is another dimension identified in this theory. In achievement cultures, status is awarded to people’s accomplishments, competencies and performance. In ascription cultures, hierarchy and titles are essential. People that are higher placed in the organization are greatly respected (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Time orientation (past, present, future) and the attitude towards it is another way of culture categorization. Past cultures value traditions, history and their ways of doing things are derived from the past. Present-orientated cultures are more concerned with the present state of accomplishing aims and making decisions. The future-oriented cultures are focused on the long-term perspective when making
decisions, prospect judgments and emphasize the achievement of future goals (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Internal-External control defines how outcomes are determined. Internal controlled societies believe that individual actions influence and control outcomes. Whereas external controlled societies believe that outside factors and circumstances influence and control results (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Shalom Schwartz

Schwartz researched the diverse value orientations in several cultures by using different perspectives. The strength of his work is clear as Hanges and Dickson (2004) describe his work as “theory-driven and based on understanding the philosophical, religious, and empirical literatures from different cultures and societies” and “it carefully considers prior works on culture and builds on them” (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008: 29). This shows the significance and validity of his work as an important tool for analyzing culture. Schwartz identified three primary values.

The first value dimension embeddedness versus autonomy can be related to Hofstede’s dimension individualism-collectivism. Here it also compares the degree of openness to change contra maintenance of the status quo. The second value dimension is hierarchy versus egalitarianism. This dimension can be slightly linked to the dimension power distance, but there is an important difference as egalitarianism demonstrates that people are moral equals and they have as humans the same basic interests. The last value dimension is mastery versus harmony. Mastery has some similar tendencies as masculinity, but while masculinity at times also implies selfishness, this is not the case with mastery. The harmony dimension can be related to uncertainty avoidance, but is not trying to control ambiguity (Guirdham 2005).

The three value based approaches for analyzing culture have been criticized for being too static in their theoretic form as culture is seen as a dynamic ever-changing force. Despite this criticism of how they approach culture these taxonomic value based approaches have produced great amount of empirical research. They have given the most valued and most extensive increase in the understanding and familiarity of cultural differences and their consequences for work behaviors. It is also important to
recognize that the theories are developed mostly by western researchers, so caution must be taken when applying them in generalization (Guirdham 2005).

Edward Hall

Another important framework for analyzing cultures is by Edward Hall. The reason for the significance of his framework is that he demonstrates an important way of dividing cultures in two. He argues that cultures can be divided into high and low context communication cultures. He developed this theoretical model in his book ‘Beyond culture’ (1976), where the model centered on the concept of context. This context is related to the two different communication context forms. Low-context communication cultures are more individualistic, and people seem to only pay attention of the direct content of the words and not factors surrounding the word such as social status, voice tone or gestures. As for high-context communication cultures personal needs, trust, time, friendships are important. The content of the message is indirect and people tend to talk around the point (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). This theory highlights another way for analyzing cultures different from the value-based theories.

2.4. Adler’s framework general presentation

The previous cultural exploration provided some important frameworks and theories for cultural analysis. After thorough insight and understanding of theories we have obtained some great analytical tools for further analysis, the purpose is now to carry out a theoretical investigation of multicultural teamwork.

When exploring the meaning of working in a multicultural team-setting in relation to productivity of a team, advantages and disadvantages; literature suggests that it is a rather complex matter to evaluate. In general heterogeneous teams have a greater potential to reach a higher level of productivity than homogenous teams, but are in the same time exposed to difficulties. This conflicting statement is clear as Adler states that “multicultural teams thus have the potential to achieve higher productivity than homogenous teams, but they also risk experiencing greater losses due to faulty process” (Adler 2008: 134). It is clear that there are consequences of this potential resulting from faulty processes in form of negative aspects that are harmful to the productivity of the diverse team (Moran, Harris, Stripp 1993).
Nancy Adler’s model on actual team productivity is here presented as the fundament of our theoretical investigation. It is illustrated by three contributing parts: the potential of a multicultural team, the advantages and the drawbacks. These parts are both positive and negative measures of teamwork, leading to great potential on one side and in the same time to losses. Adler describes how to measure team’s actual productivity by subtracting losses due to faulty processes from teams’ potential productivity. The losses come from nonproductive actions, which might amount in frustrations and contradictory understandings. Subtracting losses from the potential productivity, lead to the team’s actual productivity (Adler 2008). We believe this framework is well suited for explaining the core of how cultural diversity influences a team in all aspects. This equation has been graphically presented below.

![Equation]

Figure 2. Team’s Actual Productivity (Source: Adapted from Adler 2008: 132)

### 2.4.1. Actual productivity (performance /effectiveness)

Productivity of a team is build upon individual contribution called taskwork and a collective contribution, which is groupwork (Salas, Goodwin, Burke 2009). Effort that each member brings individually to the group, under the definition of taskwork has been explained as “the individual responsibilities of team members that involve understanding the nature of the task, how to interact with equipment, and how to follow proper policies and procedures” (Salas, Goodwin, Burke 2009: 385). Taskwork is in fact a collection of particular steps and strategies associated with the job, whereas teamwork relates to steps and processes used in actions the team members take in order to carry out their work-related actions. The definition of teamwork as “dynamic, simultaneous and recursive enactment of process mechanisms which inhibit or contribute to team performance and performance outcomes” (Salas, Goodwin, Burke 2009: 41) links the team effort to team’s performance. In order to understand and investigate what productivity means for a team, some main contributions to the term as well as models will be presented. The following terms will be further explored: team performance and team effectiveness, effective team performance and the team task.
Team performance

Team performance is “a multilevel process arising as team members enact both their individual taskwork performance processes and individual and team-level teamwork processes” (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009: 41). There are several conditions chosen by Katzenbach and Smith as indicators of high-performance teams. They include interchangeable and complementary skills; a deeper sense of purpose; more ambitious performance goals; more complete approaches to problem solving; and fuller mutual accountability than real teams (Matveev & Milter 2004).

Team effectiveness

The definition of team performance and high performing teams leads to the term team effectiveness, which is “an evaluation of the outcomes of team performance processes relative to some set of criteria” (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009: 41). The effectiveness is a combination of the actual performance results and some set standards that are often related to teams’ or organizational goals. An effective team has been described by Brooks as a group of people with the same, clear understanding of team’s objectives. There is a need for definable membership, shared communication network and group consciousness for such team. He also underlines the importance of the variety of skills and knowledge that others bring to the team, and which is needed for the team members to deal with team’s tasks. Team members should also have respect and trust for each other in two dimensions – as individuals and for the contribution each brings to team’s results (Brooks 2006). Another view on team effectiveness is by Halverson and Tirmizi, where they state that a team’s effectiveness can be determined by its structure, membership and processes that relate to the level of trust, cohesion, efficacy and commitment. There are also several variables that influence teams in terms of organizational and societal contexts. Halverson and Tirmizi show some other criteria that can be used to measure team effectiveness when focusing on multicultural teams, which are productivity and performance, as well as team members’ satisfaction and learning. Integration of these factors leads to understanding of team’s effectiveness. Cultural norms in this case can have influence on team member’s perception on processes and performance. Team member’s individual criteria for the team’s effectiveness will relate to their satisfaction of the performed task (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). A proposal of effective multicultural teams formulated by Earley and Gibson states “effective teams are those with a strong team culture because shared member expectations facilitate individual and team performance and communication. A strong team culture might derive from overlapping and pre-existing characteristics of team members or newly
developed patterns of team member interaction” (Earley & Gibson 2002: 7). This definition of effective multicultural teams underlines the importance of strong relationship between team members leading to understanding of each member differences and creating a beneficial working environment.

Effective team performance

There is another term, which is a combination of performance and effectiveness expressed as effective team performance. There are several factors that correlated have influence on effective team performance. Higgs lists them as team balance; leadership behavior; inter‐team working; overcoming hurdles; autonomy; shared understanding of goals; recognition; reward; full circle feedback. These factors however are related to effective team performance for teams in general, and are not specifically formulated for the culturally diverse teams. Starting from this point, the aim of Higgs research was to combine all the requirements and develop a framework effective in cross-cultural surroundings. After thorough analysis of several theories and including factors for multinational project teams, a model intended for effective international management teams has been developed. However, it is assumed that the framework for management teams can be applied and adjusted for non-management teams as well. This makes it highly usable in our analysis since we are not focusing on a particular job function. This framework points out three issues that need to be drawn together. These are processes for understanding, valuing and leveraging cultural diversity; understanding and leveraging diversity in individual style and behavior and understanding factors relating to effective team performance. Higgs further investigates the last of these issues which is associated with the factors that have a relation to effective team performance. These factors are: team purpose, objectives, values, team member roles, team‐working processes. The combination of these factors in a cross-cultural environment allows creating a framework for developing international management teams. From the graph, “what” is related to team‐working content and focus, whereas “how” is related to style and working processes. If building a multicultural team is concerned on “what” and “how” and follows all these steps, the team is assumed to be successful. This framework is claimed by Higgs to be highly effective in practice; “the building of the team around the need to address hard and specific business issues provides a clear context for examining the cultural and process elements of performance” (Higgs 1996: 42). Additionally, this division of contents and processes for a team reinforces understanding and learning within members.
As the model before is a valuable tool when building multicultural teams, it is also important to focus on cultural diversity in already existing teams. Many organizations are in the process of introducing such teams, as well as focusing more on the diversity within their already existing teams. In his research, Higgs believes that the change is for example the need for companies to build multicultural teams or leverage the diversity within teams that have already been created (Higgs 1996).

It has been shown that the three key terms, productivity, performance and effectiveness, are highly related to each other. This leads to an assumption that factors that have influence on performance can also impact effectiveness and the other way around. This assumption of the correlation between productivity, performance and effectiveness also shows that there are a variety of aspects that can be related to them and therefore the impact is very wide. Higgs framework has been presented to underline some of the factors, contexts and processes that appear in this thorough understanding of teamwork. As today’s organizations are highly exposed to a changing environment, there is a necessity for managing this change in teams, composing new teams and continuously improving the team work. Higgs framework serves as an important tool for managing these new business challenges.

The team task

Nancy Adler argues that “the productivity of a work group- or team- depends on its task, its available resources, and its process” (Adler 2008: 131). The task is essential in teams’ group work process, as it determines and influences both the process of the work and the outcomes resulting from the work. Jackson (1992) has made a categorization of tasks dividing them into three different types. The first is production task, where people typically have a standard and routine procedure of doing things;
the next task is the intellective task that deals with the problem solving aspect of a team with emphasis on reaching a correct answer. The last is the decision-making and creative idea task where agreeing on the best solution has vital importance for the team. The more the group is involved in the group work the more exposed the group is to potential losses (Thomas 2008). This shows that potential losses are higher if team members interact more with each other in completing the task, which thereby requires more effort from members in collaborating. This argument is further explored, as it is also believed that even though there is a higher potential of losses, there are also higher potential gains from this type of task. Prat (2002) states that deciding what contributes most to the teams’ output depends on the type of task the team has to complete. In a creative setting as before where different perspectives and new ideas are required, national diversity is seen as a strong force for team productivity. If the task is more of a standard procedure, where at the beginning a strong fit of the team members is required, then homogenous teams have the capability to surpass heterogenous teams. This outcome is believed to hold true since there will not be high requirements to coordinating the team or higher costs due to miscommunication (Brandes, Franck and Theiler 2009). As a conclusion, teams working on simple and standard tasks tend to work better in homogenous teams, whereas creative tasks have higher gains when working in heterogeneous teams, but also a potential of some loses due to this complexity.

As reaching high performance is directly related to the type of team task and the potential of the task, it can be highly beneficial to look at team development in relation to the task. A theory that is highly relevant when looking deeper into the meaning and development of the task is Tuckman’s (1965) theory on team development. The importance of this theory is that it clearly describes the teams’ relationship to both the task and their relationship within the team at different stages of the group work process. The model is based on more than fifty small - group developments. These groups consist of various subgroups such as: therapy groups, professional groups, training groups etc. The model consists of five stages named forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Each stage involves different issues such as relationship issues, task issues and leadership issues etc. (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). The main interest point will be looking into how the groups’ relationship to the task might evolve into producing a highly qualified outcome. The stages will be briefly summarized in the following paragraphs:
Forming stage. In this initial stage there is no specific way of forming the team and team members seek to create a comfortable team environment. The leader must be clearly identified especially with multicultural teams consisting of different cultures and values. Here the task productivity in the team is seen as low and confused. The team is in the critical face of setting goals, which will determine the success of their task. It is important to have a high participation rate of all members and acknowledge skills of the different members into clarifying what role each member will play in the team (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Storming stage. This stage is highly challenged by conflicts arising from the agreement in the previous stage. If the goals are clearly stated and the commitment of the team is high, then this stage can be easier managed. This stage can also resolve in huge problems and difficulties for the teamwork. Due to these conflicts the task productivity is low. Here it is important to find ways of working with different personalities and cultures, and different techniques of accomplishing the task. The team has to focus on how to actually perform the task and evaluate how realistic the goals are, and how to make a plan in order to fulfill them. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions also play a role in this stage, as they can determine peoples’ relationship to the task. High uncertainty indicate that nations might find it important to have clear and concrete plans, whereas people from low uncertainty cultures may value more open plans and have acceptance for changing plans. Also, individualistic countries prefer working more independently on the specific task during teamwork, whereas more collectivist countries prefer working interdependently. On successfully completing this stage the group will have managed to develop a method of facing the differences when accomplishing the task (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Norming. Now the team has moved to a more comfortable zone of the teamwork. In the end of this stage the task- productivity is moved from medium to the high end. This is a result of the differences being accepted and people learning each other’s work methods. This productivity clearly comes from the fact that the team members are committed to the team. They have also created realistic norms that fit the diversity of the whole team, and successfully used the skills provided by the different team members. All team members’ leadership skills are also used and members feel satisfied and appreciated in the team (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Performing. At this stage the team demonstrates high will power to accomplish the task. The relationships in the team are deeper and members enjoy working together. The team is highly focused on the task. The problems of creating this diversified team that occurred in the storming stage are now seen as highly beneficial. Adler (2002) describes that multicultural teams that are able to reach this stage
will be outperforming monocultural teams. She argues that multicultural teams have the advantage of being more creative, making superior observations and having greater insights. The team should now try to maintain this high quality of their work (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Adjourning. This last stage is only used for shorter period teams, such as project teams and temporary teams. Here the team has to make closure to the work. Some members’ feel very pleased and successful by their accomplishments, whereas others are less content to be leaving their team.

This model is highly valuable when looking at teams, their progress and the development of their relationships to the task. Many factors are important when integrating people in the team. When this is accomplished then the multicultural team can reach high performance. This model must be applied with caution since not all teams go through all the stages, some will go back to a previous stage and other will experience all the stages in one time (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008).

Cross-cultural Training

Cross-cultural training is believed to be another positive influencing factor in teams’ potential productivity. As literature illustrate that training is an essential part in contributing to teams’ positive outcome and potential success. The training areas involve learning to interact with team members and learning technical skills. Cross-cultural training should serve the purpose of combining expectations people hold from various cultural backgrounds into how this is working realistically in a culturally diverse environment. The importance for success is clear as Black & Mendenhall state “the effectiveness of cross-cultural training programs on improving interpersonal interactions is documented in a number of studies” (Thomas 2008:186). From here it is evident that employees benefit from cross cultural training. Cross-cultural training is also evidently applied by forward-thinking HR experts as they also concentrate on the interaction aspect of cultures. This form of training includes information of different communication styles, time orientation and how to construct a high functioning cross-cultural team (Gupta 2008). Even though cross cultural training is a known tool by organizations, many leaders and managers automatically assume that members have already gained skills required to be efficient team members (Thomas 2008).
Non-culturally related factors that can impact multicultural teams

Multinational team theory

It is important to create an overview of the factors surrounding and influencing multicultural teams when looking from an actual productivity point of view. The cultural frameworks that have previous been presented explain the relationships between team members and the impact on the group-work mostly in terms of cultural diversity. One should recognize that nationality is not the single factor having impact on cultural teamwork. Multinational teams, likewise to homogenous teams, are also affected by the environmental and personnel features. A model that is derived from a multinational team theory shows this combined relationship. This model is composed of individual elements, group elements, as well as social structure and work structure. Process and content features are appearing in the model at a structural level in relation to individual, team and organizational level of analysis. The elements of individuals can have some effect on the team through specific processes. These elements are also critical for relationships with other team members. An example of these elements is the role identity and formation, which explains how people interact depending on how they see themselves and others in the context. There are several other elements that have such influences that this model includes. It is the same situation for group elements where some of them are: competition in the group, group priorities; shared meaning and understanding. All these factors included in the graph below may create separation within the team. A part of the model is called ‘catalyst’ which includes social and work structure as influence to individual and group elements. The most important part of Multinational Team Theory Model is the principle of balance and equilibrium that reign over all different processes, elements and catalysts included in the framework. This theory states that the equilibrium underlying the model is balancing individual’s integration and differentiation called self as individual, self as team member, and teams as part of social structure. When one of those units is too differentiated, some processes that lead to further team integration are forced. An example of that is when a team is strongly integrated into one business unit, it might adopt its own identity through some symbols, names, communication queues that integrate the team, but separate it from other teams in the organization (Earley & Gibson 2002).

Having taken such a multilayered model into account, one can see that multinational teams are dependable on many factors and the positive outcome of their work occurs only if the favorable mix is in balance. There is no definable way of combining all the factors together to achieve the intended
outcome. Multinational teams place demands on team members to reflect at all different levels of the organization. Awareness of them builds the base for good team productivity (Earley & Gibson 2002).

**Figure 4. Overview of Multinational Team Theory (Source: Adapted from Earley and Gibson 2002: 52)**

**The Three Cultures**

In relation to other factors that are not directly coming from cultural differences, but also can impact multinational teamwork, there are some interesting findings from the research of Brannen and Salk. They show that “cultural differences not necessarily have any negative effects on team performance” (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008: 7). Cultural differences should not cause team conflicts, but the organizational context and individual team members’ reactions to cultural norms create differences (Halverson & Tirmizi 2008). This implication suggests that the losses to multicultural teams’ productivity come from the more general context than just the cultural differences. Similar explanation in relation to Brannen and Salk’s research has the map of the Three Cultures developed by Gardenswartz, Rowe, Digh & Benett, 2003 (Vergheese 2008). This model assumes that trust and communication, which is the base for beneficial productive teamwork, are developed only by combining the three cultures each team member represents. The interdependence of these three is graphically presented below.
National, personal and corporate are the three dimensions of culture which are interlinked. Working in a multicultural team equals working within these three spaces. Each team member’s behavior is determined by the combination of three cultures. The national culture is the easiest to classify team members by. Personal culture builds the foundations for decision-making style, opinions and judgments making. The corporate culture is dependable on the particular organization. If assuming there is no negative effect coming from national culture, the underlying reason for team problems come from the personal and the corporate contexts. The Three Cultures approach however shows that a good understanding of one’s self, openness towards other nationalities and a good fit in organizational settings lead to development of trust and communication among team members. Therefore this also leads to all the benefits coming from their work. The understanding of the personal culture is essential for the team members before they try to become familiar with two other cultures. The interlink between personal, national and corporate culture underlines that cultural diversity is not the only factor influencing behaviors of team members.

Leadership and Supervision

Another important dimension that has influence on a team’s productivity is the term leadership. One of the team conceptualizations that have not been explained previously is the differentiation according to the role of the leader. This differentiation between the team-centered leadership and the leader-centered approach can have great influence on the team and its members. The most recent approach towards team leadership is when the roles of directing and managing teams are shared among team members. Example of such teams has been previously defined as self-managed teams. In literature, this approach is also called ‘shared leadership’ or ‘distributed leadership’. This team-
centered leadership style can be further categorized into 3 categories seeing individual leaders as internal leaders, external leaders, or executive coordinators. These types of leaders share the support function, but differ on the level of interaction and intervention in teams. The opposite leadership style is the traditional one, where teams are leader-centered, often described as ‘vertical’, ‘top-down’, or ‘hierarchical’ teams. A team in the leader-centered approach has a clearly identified role of its leader above team members. The leader here is responsible for shaping all the conditions for team’s effectiveness. Team members are more of followers, being directed by leader’s decisions (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009). Team leadership from the definition is “ability to direct and coordinate activities of other team members, assess team performance, assign tasks, develop team knowledge, skills, and abilities, motivate team members, plan and organize, and establish a positive atmosphere” (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009: 60). Multicultural teams as any other type of teams need a leader that has the capabilities for performing strong team coordination, since his or her decisions shape the entire teamwork. Leadership in vertical teams is a crucial factor influencing teams. As there are many factors that have influence on the effective multicultural teamwork, one of them is leadership in terms of what skills and competencies are required from a manager to effectively lead such team. A very in-depth study carried out by Joshi and Lazarova, analyzed all the major theories associated with multicultural team leadership. Their findings lead to identifying four competencies for effective leaders. These include communication, direction and goal setting, facilitating teamwork, and motivating and inspiring. These conclusions can also be indicators as for the points of focus for successful multicultural training programs (Shapiro, Glinow and Cheng 2005). If team leadership fails on some of these areas, it might lead to faulty processes.

Leadership as part of teamwork can have influence on whether team efforts are successful or not. The connection between a leader and a team can also be looked from another point of view. In the same way as culture might affect team members’ behaviors, it can also influence team leadership. This impact can have an effect on many aspects, such as the leader behavior patterns and the distinction between ascription and achievement. It can also put pressure on what requirements team members have towards the leader, what are their preferences and expectations of leaders and their reactions to different leadership behaviors (Guirdham 2005). In terms of Hofstede’s dimensions, there is some research stating that individualistic and low power distance nations tend to have leaders paying more attention to the experience and training, compared to collectivistic and high power distance cultures.
The individualism-collectivism differentiation can also influence how supervisors judge work teams. They can see most effective teams as those that place more reliance on other team members, those that refer more toward the supervisors, or those that show the best self-reliance. National culture can also influence the degree of team supervision (Guirdham 2005). Individualism-collectivism is just an example here of how Hofstede’s dimensions can explain different leadership preferences and behaviors, in the same manner other dimensions can have similar effects.

In concluding the section of the factors contributing to team work, it has been indicated that the work of multicultural team is associated with many influencing factors. These have relation to different layers of the team, which are not necessarily associated with the issue of cultural diversity. It is true that the combination of these factors with the cultural effects both have impact on teams’ productivity. Some research states that the creation of successful global teams is more complex than just adjusting or gaining from the cultural diversity the team members represent. An investigation of seventy global teams has showed that only eighteen percent believed that their performance was highly successful. As much as one-third of these teams considered their performance largely unsuccessful. Problems that occurred in those teams were similar to those that homogenous teams come across. These difficulties include misalignment of individual member’s goals, lack of necessary know-how and skills, undefined team objectives. However, the global teams had additional difficulties related to members’ differences in the areas of culture, language and geography (Francesco & Gold 2005). For further investigation, the possible disadvantages of culturally diverse teams and challenges that could occur should be analyzed.

2.4.2. Losses (disadvantages/challenges)

It has been shown that the actual productivity, which relates to team performance and effectiveness, can be decreased by some losses due to faulty process. The complexity of a culturally diverse composed team leads to challenges that can decrease the overall team productivity. Disagreements between team members in decisions, expectations, and workflow lead to some of the challenges these teams face (Adler 2008). In addition to these problems, there are some essential challenges that should be examined in order to explore how cultural diversity can negatively affect teamwork.
Miscommunication

Miscommunication is defined as one of the major causes of teamwork difficulties. It is emphasized in a variety of literature and seen as the main issue faced by teams (Gupta 2008). Lane describes the basic idea behind effective communication as “it involves transmitting an idea and understanding someone else’s idea” (Lane, 1997:25). By not being able to transfer this idea in an appropriate manner leads to miscommunication, which can directly lead to misunderstandings. This process is complex as Lane describes communication as the “dynamic process whereby human behavior, both verbal and nonverbal, is perceived and responded to” (Lane 1997:25). What usually goes wrong in this process is that people do not fully understand these cultural influences that directly affect a team. Team members have to master communicating interculturally with an honest and sincere desire (Lane 1997). This suggests that people’s willingness to communicate in an intercultural setting has a major importance.

Brett et al. see the force of miscommunication coming from the impact of direct versus indirect communication forms. They argue that people coming from Western countries communicate explicitly expressing the meanings directly. On the opposite, communication in many other cultures is indirect with the context playing an important role. Interaction between direct and indirect communicators can create barriers to understanding, limited information sharing or even interpersonal conflicts (Brett, Behfar, Kern 2006). Miscommunication can also be drawn from differentiating between formal and informal style. Informal communicators tend to interrupt other speakers and talk over each other, while formal communicators obey certain behavioral rules in conversations. Co-working with members using different formal and informal communication styles might influence the dynamics of the work-flow and create interpersonal problems. Culture is clearly the main determinant of what communication styles different cultures hold. An example is that egalitarian cultures tend to use an informal communication style and this is not determined by hierarchical rules. Cultures of high respect for authority behave in more polite ways in their perception manner - taking turns when speaking, having a formal speaking style and often seeing habits of people from other cultures as rude (Gupta 2008). The differences in communication styles is clearly something people have to be aware of when working cross-culturally, otherwise it can lead to highly unwanted situations.
As miscommunication is such a strong negative force when working in culturally diverse teams, it can be highly beneficial to look deeper into the sources of this difficult communication process.

Lane, Maznevski and DiStefano present a framework on the evidence that intercultural communication is highly leading to miscommunication and misunderstandings in culturally diverse teams. This is due to the fact that the benefits of having various perspectives are often not appropriately delivered to a team. The model incorporates three main parts. The first part is a map of understanding the cultural differences between cultures. If people are not able to create maps, then it is almost impossible to decode messages received from other team members. These maps are derived from an understanding of one’s own culture and ways of describing and identifying other cultures. An example of this mapping process is by using the previous described value-oriented frameworks. This creates a greater understanding and cultural awareness. The next component of the model is the communication part, which is the essential part where the differences must be bridged. At this time an understanding is obtained from the cultural mapping process and now the differences from the values must be bridged. This involves increasing one’s own motivation and confidence in own abilities to communicate across cultural differences; and be understood and understand others. Also finding commonalities referred to defining some shared rules when communicating. This means for example the choice of the degree of direct communication and the use of silence. People have to be able to decentering without blame, which refers to the fact that one should always keep the other persons cultural code in mind when sending and receiving messages. The last component of the model is the integration part. This part is necessary as it is not sufficient only to be able to understand and bridge the cultural differences. One must be able to manage the differences in an effective manner in order to reach high performance in the team. This integration deals with building
participation among members in the group by making sure that all of them provide the team with their ideas. This reflects the cultural orientations where if people are from hierarchal cultures then ideas might be kept from superior persons; also people from individualistic countries are more willing to provide the group with their idea. It is necessary for success that all ideas in the team are heard. Another part of the integration process is being able to resolve ideas. Various viewpoints and ideas might create disagreements and handling these is an important challenge. Communication is playing a major part in handling this and practicing effective conflict resolution. The last part of the integration is moving forward and building on the ideas by trying to combine the different ideas and reach acceptable solutions (Lane 1997).

Lack of cohesiveness

Cohesiveness is described as one on the major determinants for teams to succeed. The definition of cohesion is as it “refers to the forces that bind members to each other and their group” (Guzzo and Brawley, 2000). Due to the complexity of multicultural teams achieving this stage of cohesiveness is difficult. Furthermore, Thomas et al. found that “teams composed of culturally diverse members experienced less cohesiveness than did those in cultural homogenous teams” (Wright & Drewery 2006). Meaning they are not connected to each other in the strong sense as they are in homogenous teams. Nahemow and Lawton likewise emphasize this point as they state that people feel greater attraction to members that are similar to them. Hofstede’s value dimensions can be used in understanding why reaching this stage of cohesion is rather difficult for a team and often leads to failure. Some of the challenges can be seen as the collectivist cultures are more group oriented, very devoted and concerned by the group’s wellbeing, whereas individualistic group members are more driven towards individual achievement. Also, these collectivistic countries might have a natural talent for cooperating in groups, but in the same time difficulties working independently. Another culture specific issue that can relate to lack of unity is team members’ concept of time. Hall introduced the concept of polychromic and monochromic time. In polychromic cultures being late for a team meeting would be perfectly common, whereas people from monochromic cultures would expect team members to be exactly on time. This is clearly a disadvantage to the team functioning (Wright & Drewery 2006).

There are other forces that contribute to this lack of unity such as Harrison et al. (1998) describe how people tend to emphasis differences instead of similarities between their team members. This
refers to looking at the surface level of people’s culture instead of valuing these dissimilarities. Group size is also essential for obtaining a degree of unity, as larger team sizes lead to lower interaction between members and thereby less levels of cohesion (Wright & Drewery 2006).

Attitudinal and perception issues

Attitudinal problems can arise in forms of disliking and mistrust in teams. Adler describes that cultural diverse teams experience more mistrust than homogenous teams. People have a tendency to feel closer related and attracted to people sharing the same culture. This mistrust is believed to take its roots in misinterpretation in a cross-cultural environment and not due to any concrete dislike. Mistrust also leads to another negative point of increased stress compared to homogenous teams (Adler 2008). Perception issues are related to how people inappropriately make usage of stereotypes when approaching people from other cultures. They are not able at first hand to see what contributions and skills this other individual from another culture is in possession of. People might use national stereotypes to explain characters of team members. This might lead to people preferring to work with economically stronger countries than those of lower status (Adler 2008).

The absence of cultural self-awareness

People might emphasize too greatly the skill of being able to understand other cultures, but another dimension of this is being able to understand the characteristics of one’s own culture. The awareness of it would help recognizing what the appropriate and most successful characteristics are for interacting cross-culturally. This would limit the least appropriate and wanted features and also related behaviors. Having an increased cultural self-awareness makes people able to forecast what impact one’s behavioral characteristics have on other people.

Decision-making issues

Decision-making is according to Brett et al. problematic issue as cultures differ greatly in their decision making style. The decision-making process consists of conflicting norms, which has its roots in the cultural background. Contracting norms are associated with the time needed for decision-making, the processes itself and the way the decision is communicated (Brett, Behfar and Kern 2006). This can lead to some difficulties in the collaboration of the team.
2.4.3. Potential productivity (advantages)

Potential productivity is the ideal outcome of team’s efforts. After the recognition of the faulty processes and the problems that contribute to losses of a team’s potential, there is a need to look at the maximum capabilities of a team. These capabilities are directly related to the advantages of multicultural teamwork. Having the overview of the drawbacks of culturally diverse teams and assuming that they are overcome and/or managed effectively; one should acknowledge the potential gains of multicultural teamwork. These advantages can be directly related to the character of the group as it is for great creativity and limited groupthink. Other multicultural teams’ gains are concerned with the capabilities that members bring to the group, meaning the variety of skills and their work flexibility. Another advantage of multicultural teams has an economical impact as it is to fulfill the current market needs. Each of these multicultural team-work benefits is to be explained further below.

Creativity

With the focus on the advantages, Gupta argues “despite the layers of complexity inherent in multicultural teams, such groups offer companies distinct advantages” (Gupta 2008: 80). One of the benefits the teams bring is a higher level of creativity to the working environment. As the diversity by definition means variety, it can also be seen in a team as the variety of thoughts, ideas and solutions the different members propose. Adler confirms this argument as there are often very different backgrounds; members of multinational teams have the capacity to list down more ideas, alternatives and finally solutions (Adler 2008). Their creativity can differ due to their cultural influences; therefore they often think of other options and have different approaches to problem solving. Therefore diversity in multicultural teams has the capabilities of bringing better results with more creative solutions (Gupta 2008).

Limited groupthink

Another way cultural diversity can positively impact the team is by limiting “groupthink” within the team. The term ‘groupthink’ means “a mode of thinking in which people engage when they are deeply involved in a cohesive group, in which strives for unanimity override motivations to realistically appraise alternative courses of action” (Brooks 2006: 103). Here it is evident that each member’s independent thinking is limited by all members reaching a stage of cohesiveness. Adler furthermore
concludes that groupthink is a major source of ineffectiveness in teams. Additionally to this, she points out several counterproductive behaviors involved in groupthink that diverse teams are less likely to be engaged in as compared to homogenous teams. These behaviors include ‘self-censoring’ deviations from the team agreement, which particularly appear when team members do not express their doubts and thoughts. Another behavior is ‘sharing an illusion of unanimity’ based on the assumption of the majority some treat silence as consent. Groups led by groupthink can also engage in ‘directly pressuring’ members who express contradictory views, whereas at the same time so-called ‘self-appointed mind guards’ will protect the team from unfavorable information that could crash common consensus (Adler 2008). Groupthink appears due to the fear of being diverse, since it can be seen by the types of groupthink behaviors that most of them are associated with different opinions of team members. Diversity in a team brings down those barriers; therefore the fluency of various ideas is on a higher level.

The variety of skills

Multicultural team members are often invited to join a particular team after a strict selection. Companies do this in order to create diverse teams for specific purposes, or to solve particular tasks. “Earley and Mosakowski (2002) stated that multicultural teams are used because of belief that they out-perform monoculture teams, especially when performance requires multiple skills and judgment” (Ochieng and Price 2009: 529). Culturally different team members, due to their different background, can often have more experiences with a variety of work, education and training as compared to homogenous teams. Brooks argues in favor of heterogeneous teams that diversity does “ensure that the team will have the adequate mix of skills, knowledge, expertise and experience to guide itself” (Brooks 2006: 110). This argument underlines the strengths of multicultural teams as a collection of members with complementary capabilities.

The advantage of having skills combined of team members from various national backgrounds is furthermore clear as Lazear has developed a theoretical reasoning based on this idea. He states that “different cultures provide different distributions of skills and knowledge and that the correlation in skills of two individuals drawn from the same country is likely to be larger than the correlation between two individuals from different countries” (Brandes, Franck & Theiler 2009:231). This shows that teams composed of the same nationality do not have the same abilities as teams from different national backgrounds. To emphasize this point, Lazear provides a theoretical example. Here a company has the
possibility of hiring two employees from two different nationalities. He refers to them as A and B. The skills of these employees are referred to as ε and η. In order to optimize the teams’ capabilities they would have to find the maximum of (ε, η). The company faces a choice of either employing one person from nation A and one from B, or two from nation A, or two from nation B. The skills are assumed to be different across A’s and B’s, but identical for all A’s and B’s. In maximizing (ε, η) it is most beneficial to rely on multicultural teams as Lazear argues that employing only a homogenous team would lead to a less favorable outcome since this would equal (ε, ε) = ε and (η, η) = η. He also states that the argument is believed to hold true even though the B’s are on average not as skilled as the A’s (Brandes, Franck and Theiler 2009). This theoretical example proves the fact that teams highly benefit from having members from different nations with diverse skills.

Flexibility

Another positive advantage of multicultural teams is that cultural diversity in teams makes them more flexible, by being more ready to adapt to change if it occurs as they have a great global reach. Flexibility generally has to be assumed to appear on a higher level within culturally diverse teams as opposed to homogenous teams. Team members’ awareness of their diversity makes them more flexible when adapting to changes. This is because there is no common set of directives or rules coming from their culture that must be assumed to exist within other. The global reach is self-explanatory within the context of organizational globalism since the working environment of multicultural teams is global from the definition (Brooks 2006). The challenges associated with the global character of the work that diverse team members must be aware of, might not even have the possibility to appear in a case of homogenous teams.

Market needs

It has been indicated that diversity brings different perspectives, more creative solutions and wider scopes of ideas. The advantages are clear for global companies in using these teams for particular projects. This company advantage is stated as it “enables them to be more competitive in serving the needs of their customers” (Brooks 2006: 110). Global companies often have to develop products and services that suit many culturally different markets. Having collected perspectives and ideas from people of different cultures, they are able to create, develop and suit their offer towards many different consumers. Diversity of ideas can also improve the process of new market expansion for companies, as
well as the recruitment of new talented people. The same point of view has Salas et al. who underline that many organizations have already acknowledged the benefits that culturally diverse teams bring, and therefore they often create such teams on purpose for accessing all unique perspectives that come from cultural differences team members bring (Salas, Goodwin and Burke 2009).

Adler’s framework on actual productivity provided a solid fundament for important theories related to the matter. By using this framework we were able to categorize favorable and less positive factors directly affecting multicultural teams. It also led us to define the meaning of the actual productivity in a cultural diverse team.

3. METHODOLOGY

As previous literature and frameworks have been presented as secondary information to support an understanding of the topic, it is now important to take this analysis further into designing a methodological research method.

Different elements are important when designing a research. Those elements in the following section will be examined and argued for the most appropriate methods for performing the research. The first two essential components of the research design are defining the research question and the goals of our study. As our research question has been previously defined, the goal of this study is to provide further insight into the effect of cultural diversity on teamwork. We believe this will picture the effects of having employees from various nations. Furthermore the goal is to create an understanding of the interaction process in a team. As part of describing the goals of the study there is a need for making a unit of analysis of the research question. The unit analysis serves the purpose of breaking down the research question into deciding what objects should be included and at what level the research is performed. This allows us to examine what measures we have to use to answer the research question, and what is the essential problem (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler 2005). As we are examining the effect of national culture on team work, our object will be the team members performing the work and our variables will be the different factors of cultural diversity. These variables can for example be the values, attitudes and behaviors people have.
In selecting a research methodology two approaches are widely recognized. These are qualitative and quantitative approaches. The appropriate method is chosen from the needed information in order to examine the research question. A short presentation of the two research designs is needed to understand our choice. The basic ways the two approaches differ is as Boris Blumberg describes “quantitative studies rely on quantitative information (i.e. numbers and figures), while qualitative studies base their accounts on qualitative information (i.e. words, sentences and narratives)” (Blumberg 2005:124). There is a clear distinction that quantitative studies are more concerned with the numeric approach in the analysis, whereas the qualitative studies with the meaning of words. As the qualitative approach is more looking from the subjective point of view by describing the problem from the individuals experiencing it in a more in-depth format. In contrast, the quantitative approach is more objective looking at the observed data and being less in-depth (Blumberg 2005). Another important point that differentiates the two approaches is that qualitative research is concerned with understanding behavior from actors’ own perspective and being process oriented; whereas the quantitative research is looking at some causes of the social phenomena, being more outcome-oriented (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 2006). By these clarifications of the two approaches the qualitative research is chosen for this thesis. This is due to the fact that our goal is to explain and understand the phenomena, and the complexity of the topic by having various potential variables from national cultures affecting group work. Furthermore, we are interested in the process of how people make sense.

3.1. Perspectives in qualitative research

Perspectives in qualitative research differ in various ways, such as their theoretical assumptions, the methodological center of interest and how they recognize the object of the study. The perspective chosen is the symbolic interactionism, which is a perspective that studies the subjective meanings and the meaning making by individuals. By choosing this perspective we are focused on the meanings the team members associate. The chosen viewpoint in qualitative research also determines the methods for collecting data and the analytical tools for analyzing. In the subjective standpoint the interpretation methods include coding and content analysis (Flick 2006). There are basic assumptions for this perspective. These are described as the following:

“The first premise is that human being act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them...The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are
handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Flick 2006: 66).

These basic assumptions allow us to analyze our respondents as they see the world from a subjective viewpoint and in this way we can see the world from their perspective.

The methodological approaches to knowledge creation

For creating business knowledge there are three main methodologies: the analytical approach, the systems approach and the actors approach. All these approaches differ in their understanding of reality and assumptions. The analytical approach assumes that the reality is objective and it is concerned with explaining the phenomena where knowledge does not depend on individual people. The systems approach assumes that reality is objectively accessible and knowledge depends on systems. Lastly, the actors’ approach can be combined with the subjective viewpoint where the actors see reality as a social construction and are not concerned with explanations but rather understandings. The knowledge creation depends on the individuals where this reality/knowledge composes socially constructed meaning structures. This approach is believed to be the most appropriate method for our research. It is also based on the understanding created by the team members and their teamwork. This gives insight into how the actors view themselves, the organization and the interactions between them.

As the actors approach is dependent on the actors’ meaning making, it is clear that in order to understand the whole, referred to as the total picture, the different actors’ sense making must be understood. This is clear as “the whole is understood via the actors’ finite provinces of meaning” (Arbnor & Bjerke 1997: 54). The actors’ finite provinces of meaning refer to how the actors view themselves and others. Also, how they see their actions, how they interpret and the relations between these. The finite provinces of meaning that actors hold can overlap in different areas. The overlapping parts consist of the common parts of reality groups that people share. Understanding this reality will lead us to an insight into our own reality (field of investigation) being how national culture influences group work (Arbnor & Bjerke 1997). The illustration below represents ellipses for each of the different actors being the team members’ finite provinces of meaning. The actors will have (1) individual knowledge and (2) knowledge shared by only some actors. The shaded part in the middle represents the features that are common to all actors that can be seen as highly relevant for our study. This will furthermore lead to an enhanced understanding of the actors (Arbnor & Bjerke 1997).
3.2. **The method of data collection**

From the methodological direction chosen for this thesis and with the subjective perspective, the primary data collection tool can be identified. In the early stage of our thesis work we thought a face-to-face interviewing form would be the most appropriate, but due to limited resources and not being able to reach the desired population, this idea was neglected. For this study an e-mail interview has been created, as we believe it is the most appropriate method for our study. This form of interviewing is a part of the qualitative online research methods. This method is one of the methodological developments and new trends in the qualitative field of researching. Qualitative research is also affected by the technological expansion by using the Internet to perform interviews. This has previously been limited to the form of quantitative online questionnaires (Flick 2006). We believe qualitative online interviewing is an important tool, since it is an innovative and creative method of reaching a population situated in different locations all over the world. This makes our study more dynamic and accurate, as we want to examine the effects of cultural diversity on teams in various countries.

The strength of online interviewing

Interviewing by the use of an e-mail format is part of the new concept of online interviewing. This refers to interviewing people in a chat room or in the form of e-mail exchanges. A greater amount of people use e-mail as their secondary communication form (Flick 2006). It can contribute greatly as a tool to reach people that are not easily accessible, also it does not have the time consuming factor of
transcribing the interviews since they are already done in text. This method allows us to reach all the people of interest, instead of only contacting those easily accessible. The online interviewing form is a new phenomenon, but it is believed that it will play a huge part in the future (Flick 2006). The advantage of this e-mail interview form is that it allows the respondents to create their own reality throughout the interview. They are anonymous in their answers as their personal information will not be revealed. This is an advantage since they are assumed to be more open in their answers and feeling comfortable giving examples, explaining their experience and not holding any information back. Whereas, in face-to-face interviews some professionals might find it time consuming and they could be less willing to reveal their true feelings towards the topic. Another optional method for interviewing is by the use of the phone. Together with the e-mail interviewing, they are able to reach the desired population at diverse locations. However, phone interviewing can be more time consuming and difficult to set up due to the time differences. Another factor considered is the limited time from the respondents’ side. The advantage is that we as the researchers could have been able to influence the interviews, which is not a possibility in the e-mail form. However, the respondents receiving our e-mail survey are able to reflect and consider the topic beforehand, making the responses more thorough compared to phone interviews where the answer must appear rapidly.

Reliability and Validity

To make sure the study is carried out in a reliable and valid manner, it is important to focus on fulfilling these requirements. The importance of these terms for the study is clear as Patton (2001) states that the two factors validity and reliability should be the main concern of any researcher when designing and carrying out a study. They are also significant for analyzing the outcomes and thereby evaluating the quality of the study (Golafshani 2003). When taking reliability into consideration, it deals with the way the study has been carried out and to what extent another researcher examining the same question is able to provide the exact same conclusion (Blaxter, Hughes, Tight 2006). This refers to the degree of consistency in the measure of the study. We believe that our study is reliable on the assumption that the answers were objective and independent; and that the respondents would state the same answers about their experience with multicultural teams if they were currently asked about the topic again. Another point is that there can be a pattern of similar answers from the interviews. The other important concept is validity. It has been a widely discussed topic, as some researchers do not believe it is applicable in qualitative research, but at the same time they understand that there is a need for
measuring the quality of the research. By this conclusion many researchers have developed their own interpretation of the meaning of validity by stating terms such as rigor of the study, quality and trustworthiness (Golafshani 2003). These terms contribute to the validity and are therefore measured when evaluating our study. This is done by looking at the method we have used, techniques and approaches if they measure our area of exploration. We believe that these requirements are fulfilled as this study is thoroughly carried out with theoretical background and a research design purposely to measure our problem formulation.

3.3. The respondent selection

The population was chosen by the criteria that respondents had some experience working in multicultural teams. Both professionals currently working in multicultural teams and people who previously had experiences with a multicultural team for either longer termed teams and/or project teams. This is believed to give a greater scope of different perspectives in the investigation of the study and in the analysis, as it includes standpoints in all angles. The criteria of which the participants were chosen on, was not strict or particular specific in terms of what industry or organization they were from; it was more based on reaching out to as many different cultures and focusing on their perspectives from working in a multicultural setting. By these criteria we used our network to establish contacts with people. Some of the people further introduced us to other potential candidates for interviewing. We also used the social networking site Facebook and the business oriented site named LinkedIn as tools for reaching out to people from various businesses. We called some of the participants to further make clear what our study was about and to make sure they were willing to participate in our research, for others this was not a necessary step.

3.4. The structure of the e-mail interview

For the e-mail interview we made a short introduction stating the purpose of the survey and created open questions in a professional appealing layout (see Appendix 1). The questions were formulated and drawn from previous presented theories and conclusions about multicultural teams. They were further more divided into 5 sections to provide the interviewee with an overview of the topic. The first section was named “Experience with multicultural teams”. These questions had the purpose of grasping the basic background of the respondents’ experience with these types of teams. This included
how frequent they had worked in multicultural teams and for what type of projects. It also asked if they had any previous acquaintance with the team members and if the organization had provided some sort of cross-cultural training. The second section was named “Opinions about multicultural teams”. This section was created based on previously presented knowledge from core cross-cultural theories. The purpose was to comprehend the respondents’ attitudes, preferences and opinions from their experience working in this multicultural environment. The third section was named “Problems/Challenges of multicultural teamwork”. The main aim of this section was to understand the negative side of multicultural teamwork. Also, to investigate what were the roots of the problems, what caused these difficulties and whether there was a link between culture and the problems that occurred. The section also examined whether the respondents found a specific stage of the group work to be more critical, and what problem-preventing actions the team members could take. The fourth section was named “National influences”, where the objective was to understand how the respondents see the influence of nationality. The last section was “General questions”. This section was created in order to understand the respondents’ background of nationality, profession and industry sector. This section was placed in the end of the interview because we wanted to obtain the respondents’ attention on the topic right in the beginning, and place these more general and obligatory questions at the end. In this section we also included a space for additional comments, in order for the respondents to freely elaborate on issues that did not fit the previous categories.

3.5. The data collection process

Before the analysis of the responses, there is a need for an explanation of steps taken in handling the interviews and the processes involved in the analysis, as well as a closer look into the characteristics of our population. The process of obtaining responses began by contacting over one hundred persons and sending them our research questions via email. From this desired group, we have received forty six completed surveys. This population consists of nineteen female and twenty seven male respondents. During the process of receiving responses, in order to handle the surveys efficiently we created reference names for each survey, as well as we used different tools for managing the surveys. The next step in the data treatment took place after receiving the responses, where a spreadsheet was created to combine answers from the respondents. This document is rather complex, but essentially helpful for the coding process and for noticing interesting patterns in the responses.
3.6. The method of data interpretation

Having reached this stage of the data treatment process, where a search for patterns is needed, there are several approaches for analyzing, interpreting and understanding the data collected by the e-mail interviews. An approach used for breaking down data into smaller approachable chunks is formed from the subjective viewpoint as being theoretical coding. The advantage of using coding as an investigative method can be recognized as Flick explains “coding here is understood as representing the operations which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways” (Flick 2006: 296). It is clear that coding serves as a strong detail oriented tool for data analysis. There are three different forms of coding. These are named “open coding”, “axial coding” and “selective coding”. The process of coding begins with the general open coding then moves to axial coding, which serves to distinguish the categories from open coding. Lastly the process moves to a more analytical direction by using selective coding (Flick 2006). Coding is an essential part of data analysis, but as Michael Agar (1991) argues that qualitative analysis is an extensive process not holding one single path when analyzing. Using extensive coding of the data might not lead to a single optimal strategy for the data treatment. He furthermore states that the thinking process where an examination is carried out is critical for the sense formation. Here the first goal should be looking at the collected data and building some sense from it. Secondly it is important to look at different connections and patterns across and within the data. The last goal should be discovering important areas of the researched phenomena (Seidel 1998). From these forms of the data investigation, it becomes important to find an intermediate form of analysis consisting of both coding and a critical examination. Caution should be taken when only using intensive coding techniques as it might produce less useable data. This argument is further explained by Agar as “a little bit of data and a lot of right brain” (Seidel 1998: 7). From this statement it is evident that coding should only be used to a beneficial degree. Therefore coding must be carefully considered by the researcher in order to achieve the best results. This conclusion is essential for the qualitative analysis of the e-mail interviews. Our aim is to combine theoretical coding with our own sense making. The data will be presented by the following structure: an extensive summary and interpretation of the treated data from the specific categories after the use of open, axial and selective coding combined with an analysis.
4. THE EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4.1. Presentation of the respondent population

One of the general questions in the survey was asking each respondent for their nationality. Since the biggest number of our questions is associated with the topic of national cultural differences, we felt there was a need for becoming more familiar with our respondents’ backgrounds. There are two reasons for this consideration. First, having information about their nationalities allows us to see how it spreads among different countries around the world to further check the generalizability of our findings. Secondly, it could explain some of the patterns we are looking for. This graphical illustration below shows the nationalities of the respondents and the number of people from this particular country.

Secondly, to get a better insight of our respondents’ population, we have combined together all the professions that are stated in the surveys. It draws our attention to different work occupations of people who participated in this study, and combined with their nationalities shows how different their backgrounds are. The way that allows us to clearly present the professions of our respondents is a mind map as the graphical illustration. The way we created it, was first by grouping different professions into categories to combine similar working areas. This mind map below shows the diversity of people who
have experience with working in multicultural teams and confirms that such teams are used in a variety of job profiles.

4.2. A summary of the findings divided into categories

Experience with multicultural teams

Work in a multinational team

The first question under the category related to the experience with work in multicultural teams investigated the background of our respondents. In order to see how broad their experience is with culturally diverse teams, they were asked to state the frequency of such work. The summary of their answers has been presented below in two graphical figures. The first one shows the distribution of their experience in the number years. This illustrates that our respondent population varies from people who work or have worked in multicultural teams for only a couple of months to people with up to thirty five years of experience.

Figure 9. Mind map of respondents’ professions
The second graph below shows how often the respondents interact or interacted with multicultural teams.

Type of project and influence on teamwork

The respondents were asked of the type of project they have been involved in and whether it had influence on the teamwork. As seen before from the professions in different industries, our population is spread across various job functions. This leads to a diverse representation of projects. These projects range from assignments such as information system implementation to major construction projects. In general when interpreting the questions, the respondents believe that multicultural teams have a greater influence on the projects as opposed to how the projects can influence the teamwork itself.

A majority of the respondents believe there is a competitive advantage for the business and need in the market of having multicultural perspectives on projects. This interpretation is clear as the respondents state:
“Multinational teams had competitive advantages on these typologies of projects”

“Multinational environment and team has quite a big influence on the final success. Some members of your multicultural team know the clients, partners better from their own countries”

It is clear that these respondents believe that having projects consisting of members from diverse backgrounds enables them to be competitive and gain inside cultural knowledge to other nations. This is furthermore seen from literature as organizations today recognize the benefits of using these teams and they often take advantage of the perspectives different nations bring to projects. This is clear as the respondent describes:

“I think it was/is vital that a team involved in cross-cultural marketing and branding is multicultural in order to get the right balance when dealing with an international brand”

Here the type of project requires a multicultural diversity in order to balance the team for the project. The various perspectives affect the task in a positive direction as it is essential for the project to have these different cultures represented. In concluding this section, it is clear that the respondents believe that multicultural teams affect projects in a highly positive direction.

Members known prior to the teamwork

A majority of the respondents did not know their team members before working with them. This result shows that our respondents in general encounter each other as their teamwork begins. This is regardless of the nature of the team as being taskforces, formal/informal teams or self-managed teams. Some respondents answer that they have previously worked with team members they knew. This appears because some of them have years of experience within the company, or are positioned in departments that continuously work in team collaboration.

Preparation

Another question is whether the respondent had any previous cross-cultural training. The data demonstrate that around twenty percent had received cultural training and eighty percent had not been provided with any cross-cultural tools. Previously presented literature shows that cultural norms clearly have impact on teams’ performance. Additionally, Higgs framework for developing international management teams show that cultural understandings, valuing and leveraging cultural diversity are important factors for teams’ performance. It is also proven that cross-cultural training leads to a greater potential of success in teams as they learn valuable tools for interacting. There are evidently high
benefits resulting from the use of this training. It can be questioned why many organizations do not place more effort into training and educating their employees with cross-cultural skills, as training has proven to affect multicultural teams in a positive direction. This common choice by companies is evident as scholars’ state that many companies assume that their employees already are in possession of these skills. They might value experience more and doubt if training is the right approach for gaining cross-cultural knowledge. It is also noticeable as only one respondent states that cross cultural training is beneficial and useful. The others simply explain what type of training they have received. From the data it can instead be derived that most organizations are concerned with providing training that is directly related to the type of task. This conclusion can be seen as one of the respondents states that he did not experience any cultural training:

“*There was a team presentation session. However emphasis was not on cultural divergence, but on common objectives and making the project done*”

Organizations seem to be more concerned with preparing the employees for the task. This leads to some skepticism if it actually makes a difference in practice whether the company provides training or the employees learn from their experience. Here the respondent states her view on cross-cultural training:

“*There has been nothing like this at all, at any job I have had so far and it makes me wonder why would this be needed...you really start to comprehend how much variety there is in the world by getting to know people from literally, everywhere around the globe*”

This statement supported by other statements from respondents, show that in practice companies and employees highly value experience as an important factor when dealing with cultures. Some respondents also explain how their job profile expects some previous cross-cultural experience. This leads to a conclusion that learning by experience might be a valid training tool.

*Opinions on multicultural teamwork*

**Team preference**

Questions in the category of multicultural teamwork opinions include whether the respondents prefer working in a multicultural team, the advantages of this type of team and the benefits experienced. A general observation from the interviews is that more than half of the respondents state their preference for working in multicultural teams. Twenty percent believe it depends on the task and twenty percent like working in both types of teams. Only three out of the respondents favor homogenous teams. The majority have answered with preference for multicultural teams; this has also previously
been argued in literature that such teams have great potential for success. The respondents in general recognize the benefits and the high performance from this format of teamwork. Since an extensive body of our respondents favors working with other cultures, it can be concluded that mostly they believe the positive features of the teamwork outweigh the negative aspects. The respondents in general believe multicultural teamwork is a beneficial learning process, which is highly valuable for an effective team performance. This can be seen from these statements:

“I prefer to work in a multicultural team as this gives me the opportunity to work in a diverse environment of various attitudes, skills sets, approaches to the work and trouble shooting.”

“Multiculturalism may create tensions, but generally advantages outweigh disadvantages: creativity, broader perspective, untypical solutions for the problems etc.”

It is clear that different working approaches, perspectives and ideas are factors that settle the preference for numerous respondents.

The respondents that state their preference to be dependent on the task see the potential of increased productivity in a team. As previously presented, scholars argue that the task is essential as it determines the outcome of the teamwork. If the task consists of a standard procedure, which is referred to as being a production task, then people prefer working in a homogenous team. If the task is more demanding by requiring creativity, innovation and new perspectives, then the multicultural team is favorable. This is evident as the respondent explains her preference:

“Depends on the task – if I want something done fast I prefer the same cultural backgrounds, if I want to create something long-term and inclusive, I prefer several cultures.”

This statement is in accordance with theory, as a standard procedure requires a perfect fit of team members right from the beginning. Thereby homogenous teams have the capability of being stronger in this specific situation. Another finding in the relation to the task is that the team members can strive to combine a team that fits the market needs. A driving force for multicultural teamwork is having local knowledge and perspectives that are highly beneficial for the company and teamwork. This can be seen as the respondent states it to be dependent on the task:

“Depends on the situation and the task at hand. If solving a problem in a specific region it for sure provides valuable perspectives to have people from that region involved.”

Depending on the task is not merely seen from the nature of the task as being simple and routine-formed or of a more complex nature. It also involves looking at the requirements of the task, if there is a
need for a diverse team composed of cultures that match for example the market where the product is launched.

The three respondents that exclusively prefer homogenous teams state similar arguments that are seen from literature. Their preferences appear for example due to the simplicity of working with members from the same nationality, smoother communication and similar working approaches.

The multicultural team advantage

In answering what advantages people notice from being members of multicultural teams, their answers did overall match the arguments presented earlier by scholars. From our fundamental thesis model derived from Adler’s framework, it is clear that the respondents highly recognize numerous potentials and advantages of having teams composed of diverse cultures. A majority of the respondents believe that creativity and having various perspectives are the main advantages. Mainly, the respondents value the fact that cultures contribute to different pieces in the puzzle when forming an optimal team. The cultural influences are believed to work as a strong force. An example of these cultural advantages can be seen as the respondent explains:

“Generally speaking each culture brings different things to the table: My experience with Hong Kong team members; they are very energetic, detailed oriented, high power people. Mexican team members; very held back, taking in all information before expressing opinions. American team members; very out spoken, not always with a lot of details, very creative.”

Different cultural influences are clearly believed to bring various positive effects to a team. Here the respondent recognizes how the various cultural values, norms and beliefs determine diverse ways of behaviors in the team.

The advantages of having members contributing with different approaches are also seen; as many of the respondents believe that the different skills from nationally diverse people is a major advantage. This advantage is evident from literature as team members with diverse backgrounds tend to have complementary capabilities resulting in a superior mixed team. An example of this point is clear as the respondent states:

“... there are different types and level of skills in a group of international people than if it was only a group of Americans.”
This quote combined with other responses underline the diversity of skills in heterogeneous teams and it is also proven in the previously presented model by Lazear. As his theoretical reasoning is build upon the idea that teams composed of the same nationalities do not have the same capabilities and skills as opposed to teams with various nationalities.

Another point of the importance of having teams composed of people from different nations is the aspect of fulfilling the global market needs. Being able to be global and act local is seen by the respondents a foremost advantage. This is explained as the respondent argues:

“*My job involves doing business in a number of countries around the world and without team members from various countries/cultures the job would be so much harder. In most cases to do solid local business you need understanding of the local environment, it is a key skill to have within the team.*”

This advantage is previously presented as scholars argue that the global organizations are increasingly acknowledging the benefits multicultural teams have for business, and by using them they are able to tailor a team composed of experts in the different areas needed.

Some unexpected findings from the data are that three of the respondents were unable to mention any advantages of multicultural teamwork. Opposed to the theory, one respondent believes that skills are not determined by nationality, by the statement:

“I don’t think it is so much the members nationality that is the key issue here. If the skills are there, then the nationality does not matter”

This opinion is different from literature and the opinions from the majority of the respondents. Here the respondent does not see an advantage of having skills being culture related.

An additional advantage listed by the respondents is that multicultural team members know various local languages that can benefit a team when doing business. Also, the respondents state personal gains in the form of increased cultural knowledge and great experience. Some directly describe how these different cultures lead to an increased productivity. This is clear from this statement that multicultural teams have:

“...*various ideas means better output, more choices, better business processes, and in general, a better experience*”

It is proven that the respondents believe multiculturalism has many positive influences on teamwork and this conclusion has similarly been proven by previously presented theories and literature.
The benefits of using multicultural teams

In this category the respondents answered what benefits they have experienced from working in multicultural teams. From interpreting the data it is clear that many of the answers are similar to the advantages stated in the previous question. Some respondents refer back to their answer in the advantage question. The respondents state personal gains as a major benefit from a multicultural team. This involves personal insight, inspiration from other cultures and learning new ways of performing tasks. Other benefits similar to the advantages are the increased team productivity and the creativity members bring to a team. Especially for the benefits people highly value cross-cultural experience as a major learning tool. This can be seen as the respondents state:

“... members of the group learned from each other about most common “do’s and dont’s” of each culture...”

“Different cultural perspectives through participation in mixed teams than would ever have been possible from reading books. This experience has often equipped me with valuable knowledge”

From these quotations and the other answers, it is clear that gaining cross-cultural experience has a high value for the interviewees. This enables them to examine the culture and notice all the similar and different traits culture consists of. Here the respondent describes this benefit as a learning process:

“You have a good chance to know other people from different countries, how they are thinking, how they are acting”

It is evident that the respondents are in an educational process of how cultures determine people’s behaviors, attitudes and values. This idea of how complex and multilayered cultures are, have previously been seen by Schein’s model. Some respondents are able not only to reach the surface level of approaching cultures; they are going beyond into the less visible values in cultures. These levels of culture determine people’s attitudes, norms and beliefs. It is clearly an advantage if people are able to go beyond a culture as it can lead to an increased understanding of differences. In regards to other benefits that are not explained above, a few respondents also mention the development of English skills and the ability of networking in a global setting.
Problems / challenges of multicultural teamwork

Disadvantages, challenges and problems in multicultural teamwork

The respondents were asked in one question: what disadvantages they have experienced from working with different nationalities and in another question: what challenges and problems they have experienced. There is a pattern of answers in both of these questions that lead to similar results. What they see as challenges when working in multicultural teams, can also be seen as disadvantages for the team. Therefore the data will be presented collectively.

A main observation of the data is that the answers are in accordance with our theoretical fundamental model derived from Adler. The majority of respondents have reported similar faulty processes such as miscommunication, attitudinal issues, lack of cohesiveness, perception issues etc. There are some respondents that highlight other problems, such as foreign language issues, ethnocentrism and the difficulty of interpreting time. The majority of respondents answer that miscommunication resulting in misunderstandings is the main issue that is a disadvantage and a challenge for multicultural teams. This conclusion is similar to previously presented literature, where miscommunication is seen as a strong negative force for teams. Here the respondent describes this process as being time consuming for the team:

“Different ways of discussing often influence the communication in unforeseen ways – if what you say doesn't mean what you meant to say in another cultural context, communication becomes a very time consuming task.”

What makes the communication process progressively more difficult can be analyzed by the use of the previously presented MBI model. Here the three components to high performance and effective communication must be drawn together in order to appropriately create space in teams for various perspectives. It also points out that intercultural communication often leads to miscommunication (Lane 1999). In this example the respondent might be aware of the different cultural dimensions, the way cultures differ and also able to create maps of the culture. Where the communication goes wrong, is in the bridging part apparent from the model. If the respondent is not correctly understood, as the meaning is not communicated as intended, then it is difficult for the other team member to understand. The respondent is clearly culturally aware, as he knows that the sentence is not appropriate for that specific culture. Other respondents seem to understand the challenge of communication, but have
learned to adapt their communication style to the culture they are working with. Here the respondents state:

“Communication was an issue. I learned to select my words more carefully”

“You have to be very precise in your communication; what do I want the receiver to do... Also you have to be aware of humor and especially use of sarcasm”

These respondents have clearly reached the bridging stage of the communication process. They are trying to find some common rules when communicating as one of the respondents’ adjusts the use of humor and sarcasm. These choices are made while keeping the other persons’ cultural code in mind. The last component of the MBI model becomes apparent as the respondent states:

“You have to spend more time in trying to understand various cultures and also to secure having all members in team be active and participate. For example a Japanese member will probably not clearly say yes or no, when asked if they agree to a specific issue in a strategy. You have to find other ways to get them involved and find out what they really think.”

Here the respondent must clearly demonstrate the importance of managing the differences in an effective way, in order to be high performing team, where all members are equally participating. The integration component of the model becomes essential, also seen as the respondent is trying to build participation from the Japanese co-worker. Success of the integration process has a great importance for the team as it leads to an increased performance. Also, the cultural dimensions come into play as hierarchical countries might tend to hide their ideas from the superiors, whereas individualists are more willing to share their thoughts (Lane 1997). Therefore it is essential that a team is bridged to accommodate all cultures.

Since a majority of our respondents experience miscommunication as the main disadvantage and challenge when working cross-culturally, it will be beneficial to further examine another root to this miscommunication problem. Adler has developed a Communicating Across Cultures model, which shows the relationship between the sender and the receiver of a message. This model, similarly to the MBI model, highlights the complexity of the communication process as people are communicating interculturally. Adler argues that communication is an indirect process and the challenge for the sender is the ability to encode meaning in the form of a symbol message. On the other hand, the challenge for the receiver is to decode the symbolic message into meanings, words and behaviors that make sense. The success in decoding depends on people’s cultural backgrounds, if there is a big difference between the sender and the receiver then the result in meanings of the words will be highly different (Adler
2008). For a better understanding of the processes explained, a graphical representation of this model is presented below.

An example of this communication process can be seen a respondent describes the major drawback as:

“Miscommunication is the main disadvantage; this can often lead to frustration and resentment sometimes. Also sometimes I make decisions by myself because it would be too difficult to try and explain it to the Japanese person first, and vice versa.”

The fact that the respondent does not believe in his ability to encode a message that is understandable for the receiver being the Japanese, results in the message not being sent at all. This is possibly due to the fact, that the respondent has previously had frustrating experiences resulting from trying to encode a message that was not decoded intentionally. Adler also explains that the possibility of having the message accurately sent out is clearly reduced by the fact that the sender and receiver are from two different cultures (Adler 2008).

Another major disadvantage is language problems, as almost one third of the respondents state it as a weakness to teamwork. These problems arise from using foreign languages when working together. This issue has not previously been presented in this thesis, as the topic of miscommunication was believed to cover the language spectrum. The respondents clearly view language problems as difficult as they state that there are various ways the English language differs and people hold different levels of English competencies:

“English is the main common language but to understand Indian English can be quite a challenge!!”

“Sometimes Swedish people are not good in English or some foreign people have no good English/Swedish-language skills so it is difficult to understand each other”
“Different levels of the English language between group members”

Literature show that English is often the language used to bridge different languages. Smith & Bond (1999) describe that the use a foreign language can produce cognitive strain, meaning that the second language user puts more effort into communicating, whereas that person could have spent this time on the task itself. Literature also suggests that the more the foreign language user tends to speak the language fluently, the more competent other members view this person. Speaking a foreign language can also be tiring for the person. Sometimes this can lead to some unwanted situations as the foreign language user might pretend to understand something in order to avoid appearing incompetent. These issues are demanding for both parties, and they can also, as it was stated in the quote, be time consuming to the teamwork. It is important that they both make an effort in paying attention to details in order to communicate effectively (Thomas 2008).

An interesting finding is seen as some of the respondents mention the idea of parochialism as being a major challenge. The meaning of parochialism is that people tend to see the world exclusively from their point of view, and also believe that the only mode of acting is the way they act (Adler 2008). This can be problematic as a respondent shows an example from working with Americans:

“The Americans are always a challenging group to work with (from a European perspective) because their supreme confidence in them being the greatest nation on earth, and the fact that few of them travel outside the US and therefore think Europe is a collection of states rather than a lot of different cultures with very different values and traditions frequently makes them come over as arrogant and ignorant, or completely unaware that not everywhere is like America”

Adler argues that all countries are to a certain degree parochial, but letting it overrule is rather unfortunate. An explanation why Americans might tend to act this way can be found from their historic parochialism. There is a tendency from previous times that due to the fact that they are native English speakers, they might assume no other languages are needed (Adler 2008). Other issues similar to problems from parochialism are the difficulties arising from nations being too ethnocentric. This refers to nations seeing themselves superior to others. The difficulties amounting from this vision can be seen as a respondent describes his experience with ethnocentrism:

“Unpleasant comments from nationals considering themselves “superior” to me, e.g. ‘Which part of the third world is you country in?’”

Here the respondent feels inferior towards the other team member as one of them is expressing an ethnocentric behavior. There are valuable losses as a consequence of nations being too ethnocentric.
This argument is clear as Adler describes: “No nation can afford to act as if it is alone in the world (parochialism) or superior to other nations (ethnocentrism)” (Adler 2008: 17). In today’s multicultural environment, ethnocentrism and parochialism are clearly issues that are sensitive to teams.

Another finding is that the majority of the respondents believe that different behaviors from team members can have a negative impact on teams functioning. The behaviors people have are influenced by the culture they are from. This is clear as the respondent state:

“You have to be aware that certain behaviors’, perfectly acceptable in one culture may be considered inacceptable or insulting in another one.”

“Different background and customs. The work can be very easily disturbed by small habits that are tolerated in one culture and absolutely not tolerated in the other”

The opinion from the respondents that cultures perceive different ways of appropriately acting is also seen from Adler’s model of how people are influenced by their culture. It is clear that the values and beliefs people hold resolve in them determining what is tolerated and seen as right and wrong. These values affect the attitudes people have and thereby determine their behaviors.

Some respondents believe perception problems are a disadvantage to teamwork. These different perceptions can appear from cognitive diversity, which has been previously presented by Govindarajan and Gupta. Here, the cognitive diversity refers to how people have different perceptions of seeing the tasks and finding optimal solutions to completing them (Francesco & Gold 2005). This is clear as the respondent describes it as a disadvantage to group work:

“Perception issues - Sometimes it is difficult to get people to understand that “this is way we HAVE to do it in Finland”

Different perceptions of how to approach a project can clearly work against teamwork.

Some respondents also experience the different interpretations of time as a disadvantage. The problem is clear as they state:

“Sometimes small details as being 40 minutes late to a meeting are important issues.”

“Deadlines are not kept: Time schedules are open for interpretation (in some cultures)”

These time issues experienced by the respondents are in accordance with previously presented theory by Hall, where cultures are different in their relationship to time. In monochromic cultures, being forty minutes late to a meeting is unacceptable. Also, it is important that the deadlines are kept. At the same
time in polychromic cultures, time schedules can be disguised and being late is perfectly common (Wright & Drewery 2006). This can resolve in some difficulties for multicultural teamwork.

When analyzing the data from the two questions, it is clear that there is a pattern in the answers and in some degree to the theories and literature found. A few other respondents saw challenges from holding different work ethics and the lack of cohesiveness. Some also mention the lack of cultural understanding when working together with different nationals.

The critical stage of group work

In this question the respondents were asked: what stage of group work they saw as the most critical one. More than half of the respondents answer “the beginning”. A few believe that all stages are sensitive to problems, only some choose “the middle” stage; a small number states both “the middle” and “end”. In addition, some believe just “the end” to be the most sensitive to problems. From Tuckman’s theory on team development, it is clear that the second stage being the storming stage is the most critical in the teamwork process. In this stage disagreements occur, and the team is exposed to different working approaches and different ways of performing the task. It is believed that the storming stage in combination with the forming stage can be classified as the beginning period of a group’s working process. The majority of the respondents state “the beginning” of the project in accordance with the framework of Tuckman’s model. As the respondent states:

“... specially the beginning, because everyone is still getting used to one another and adjusting to different working styles and at the same time people want their opinion to be pushed. A lot of misunderstandings and ego issues can arise in the beginning”

It is clear that also in multicultural teams, the beginning is crucial for teams’ success. Since this phase experiences difficulties such as misunderstandings, conflicts of agreements and problems of mutual goal setting. Some respondents also point out that regardless working in heterogeneous or homogenous teams; the beginning will always be problematic. Evidently as the respondent states his opinion:

“The beginning of any project irrespective of the cultures involved is always pretty critical as team participants have to figure out not just the breakdown of tasks but to best allocate roles to suit skills, and styles.”
From Tuckman’s model, it is apparent that all stages have some challenges for teams, but especially in the storming stage. The idea that all levels of teamwork can be demanding can be seen as the respondent states her opinion on the most critical stage:

“Any of them. Beginning because of the designing of the project and plans. Middle because each nationality has a different way to perform particular tasks. End because of the stress of the end and all the tension accumulated along the project comes out and no one wants to be the “guilty” one.”

It is clear that all stages have their importance in the development of the teamwork. Even if the team is multicultural, the work process is still following Tuckman’s theory on teamwork. Cross-cultural group work is critical on the same levels as other types of teams.

The reasons for problems

This question is investigating whether the problems that appear during teamwork are mainly caused by national differences or due to some other reasons. The responses show that the main causes of team problems are not only cultural, but also personal, organizational, leadership-related; whereas the majority believes that it is a mix of different issues. This belief is expressed in the statements:

“Everything can be considered ...”

“Properly a mix of it all, you can’t say in all cases it is down to different nationalities or personality.”

The reasons related to team members’ culture are explained mainly in terms of national differences, where the background of team members contributes to problems. Some respondents underline that national differences lead to higher prejudice and stereotyping among team members. Additionally, one’s culture can limit openness towards diversity, as the respondent explains:

“People are used to their ‘own’ culture, life understandings and sometimes it is difficult to combine them with other opinions derived from cultural views.”

If leadership is seen as the main problem cause, the respondents underline the incompetency and lack of the leader’s attention towards creating a good work environment. The problems also arise when the leadership style is not strong or when there is no leader at all. It has previously been explained in the thesis, that the leadership approaches can have a positive influence on teamwork, but in the same time the approach can cause problems for the team. Furthermore, the respondents who blame the organizational environment, list unacceptable policies that some companies have which could slow down team effectiveness. Other respondents see the problem cause in personalities of different team
members more than in their nationalities. They explain that national differences are adjustable as opposed to one’s personality:

“A lot of the problems I’ve been facing have been emerging from genuine disagreement that has been rooted more in personalities than culture.”

As it was shown before in the Three Cultures Model, individual team member’s behavior is dependable on the three spheres of their culture. These are national, personal and corporate cultures, that interlinked determine one’s behaviors, and therefore can contribute to problems. All of these responses also confirm the previously presented Multinational Team Theory. Diverse teams consist of individual elements and group elements, and those two parts can influence the processes that appear in teamwork. The team can also be affected by the social and work structures as in the example of the organizational environment (Earley and Gibson 2002). However, since most of the respondents believe that the problems are caused by a mix of different issues, the cultural differences will always play a role in this mix.

The importance of cross-cultural knowledge

The respondents were asked whether a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding of the different cultures could have been a cause for problems in teamwork. In fact, ninety six percent of respondents confirm this statement from the question, as some of them state:

“Certainly. Lack of knowledge about different cultures may lead to misunderstanding regarding actions of other team members.”

“It definitely is. The more we understand each others’ culture, the more we can adapt and perform in the tasks. This lack of knowledge is costly for the company and time-consuming, which affects directly to the business performance.”

The lack of cross-cultural knowledge and no understanding of diversity can lead team members to a limited openness. This further contributes to people restraining themselves from accepting various opinions, perspectives, behaviors etc. This is explained by the statement:

“You tend to view what is said and done from your own perspective. The reality for two people in the same room may simply be perceived differently. Furthermore things can be said in a way that may lead to interpersonal conflicts even though it’s not intended to do so.”
When answering this question, some respondents give specific examples of how important the cross-cultural knowledge is in some cultures, and what things can be different. These examples are very interesting since they show how particular cultures can vary:

“... We need to understand that we do not all have the same standards of living, same religion etc. For example in the US, not making eye contact has the connotation of someone untrustworthy. But realize, too, that steady eye contact in some cultures is considered impolite or aggressive...”

“... you don’t shake hands with a Arab woman, you don’t sit with your shoe soles pointing to an Arab. ... you have to respect the Muslim way of doing business and their religion...”

“... especially in eastern countries culture, not in Europe. (e.g. clothes and their colors; behavior during business meetings)”

From all the explanations of the respondents, it is clear that a lack of cultural knowledge can contribute to problems. It is seen that the respondents with experience can give very specific examples on how cultures differ. They also underlined that the awareness and the understanding of such various behaviors and habits improves teamwork. As it has been explained before, one of the tools for bridging the cultural differences is cross-cultural training. This knowledge of corporate etiquette can improve the skills of future team members, and prepare them for the diverse issues in multicultural teams.

Problem prevention and solution

This question asked the respondents to elaborate on actions that help team members in preventing and solving problems that appear in teamwork. After the analysis of the answers, we believe that the issues raised by the respondents can be viewed from the perspective of Higgs’ research. Since Higgs’ framework for developing international management teams has already been presented, the extension of his research is the theory for managing the change to multicultural teamwork. This research, based on Lewin’s model, shows the team process appearing in the context of change. This change is for example the need for companies to build multicultural teams or leverage the diversity within teams that have already been created. Such potential changes can be associated with selection, development, reward and recognition practices and the graph below shows what actions should be taken in order to build global capabilities coming from effective multicultural teams in the organization (Higgs 1996).
The advices given by the respondents have been grouped into those three areas of actions from the model above.

➡️ Unfreezing.

*Communication of issues.* Some respondents believe that for the prevention of problems it is important to set some rules in the beginning of their work. Team members should be encouraged to raise any concerns and issues they encounter during teamwork. Extended dialogue and transparent discussion are believed to be important.

*Development of awareness and understanding.* Many answers include different advices for problem prevention and solution that can be related to increasing team members’ awareness and understanding. These advices have been broken down to the most repeated key words mentioned by the respondents. These are: listen, get involved, compromise, plan, talk, discuss, be honest, be patient, ask questions, be flexible and be open. These can be seen as a set of tools for an effective team member. Furthermore, one should be concerned about several other issues, as the respondents state:

“Communicate properly so that the other party understands well and the objective of the team work is clear. “

“Make sure everyone is giving the same importance to the value of time.”

“... be respectful of each other’s values and try to learn from differences - do not be ignorant. Do not assume you know better.“

“Enjoy and appreciate diversity.”

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Figure 13. Managing the change to multicultural teamworking (Source: Adapted from Higgs 1996: 43)
This means there is no clear set of behaviors or actions to be taken, however it can be clearly seen that if a team member is willing to consider these advices, the cooperation with other team members can be improved.

**Top leadership commitment and example.** Some respondents believe that the leader is the one responsible for problem prevention; therefore his commitment is highly valuable in the team.

Moving.

Most of the respondents believe that the most important way to prevent problems in a team is the preparation before such work. They explain that:

“A little interest can go a long way. Make an effort to learn something about the culture of your team members, there are often little things you can do to make team members feel more included.”

“Get to know general cultural differences before the business trip (e.g. trainings, literature, articles, colleagues’ experience)”

Proper preparation contributes to the sharing of learning in a team, and improves the team processes for problem solving.

Refreezing.

One of the respondents believes that the process of team creation and careful selection of team members will prevent the problems from appearing. This can also be related to the designing team selection process. Building teamworking processes is also highly valued by the respondents. The majority underline the importance of socializing with the other team members. This socializing can simply mean more personal talk with team members, spending time with them in the break, but also getting involved in some activities after work. Especially when working in other countries, the respondents see great benefits in after-work socializing with team members. As the respondents explain:

“Sometimes it is much better and more effective to get a cup of coffee or beer and simply talk (and understand) each other.”

“Off work activities are the best. The atmosphere is more relaxed and team member can connect on a more personal level. I believe this helps the understanding between team members.”

Furthermore, off-work activities can mean not only entertainment for team members, but also as an educational benefit. The respondent explains here that:

“Yes, spend time together outside the meeting rooms, visit together different markets, visit stores and learn about various markets and cultures.”

As it has already been pointed out, cross-cultural training plays an important role in teamwork. This has been confirmed again by the respondents who explain that training and teambuilding activities can
greatly improve the workflow and the environment in a team. Such group integration on different levels can help building trust among team members, increases job satisfaction, make people feel appreciated and recognized.

**National influences**

Interaction differences

First question is investigating whether the respondents see any differences in interacting with culturally diverse people as opposed to the same nationality. The answers to this question can again be compared to Adler’s framework on culture, since only a few respondents claim no influence of cultural diversity. All the other respondents list many different aspects that can be influenced culturally in peoples’ interactions. One of the respondents summarizes the most common interaction differences that she believes can appear:

“It starts from differences in greeting styles and topics considered appropriate to touch upon in discussion, to the level of trust people from same or different nationality can have to each other. Or take the lack of common language, which can lead to additional misunderstanding”.

In terms of communication, misunderstandings can not only occur from different perceptions of language among nationalities, but also in different communication styles. Language problems can come from interaction between high- and low-context communicating nations. In order to ensure clear communication, one should be aware of those differences that come from the use of dissimilar wording and language expressions. To ensure a good understanding, one person indicates:

“I try to be more specific and clear when I talk among people with different nationality because what I assume is common knowledge might not be so for other people.”

Another comparison of communication difference in interactions in heterogeneous teams is explained by:

“The subtleties of common norms and what doesn’t need to be said to be understood are given in single culture teams but might be entirely bewildering to others in multi-cultural teams. Sometimes you need to be very explicit about expectations and deliverables. Don’t assume you will be perfectly understood in a mixed culture group.”

This statement confirms that one should be aware of those deep-layered interaction differences and often alter their behavior in order to improve this communication flow. Physically noticeable features
can also contribute to different interactions, for example as a respondent explains different body language and gestures that can affect business relations:

“... some nationalities feel a deal is sealed once you have shaken hands and others do not commit fully to the deal until the contract has been signed.”

Various behaviors are deeply rooted in the cultural background. An example is the level of the hierarchy people hold that can differ among nationalities. Some of the respondents explain that there are several cultures used to flat structures in the organizations, whereas others highly value formal rules and control from their supervisors. This difference can lead to different interactions when people of those different hierarchical approaches are working together. In general, most of the respondents believe that it is easier to understand people from the same nationality and faster to find a common work approach, but the interaction with other cultures is more interesting from their personal view.

Nationalities

In this question our respondents give particular examples of nationalities they have previously worked with. This question has the aim of getting the scope of the various nationalities our respondents have interacted and worked with. It also confirms whether the respondents’ experience with different cultures is only limited to some specific countries or continents, or whether the variety of nationalities has a worldwide range. Most of the respondents list many nationalities they have worked with; this confirms that they have experiences interacting with various nations to a high global degree. The most illustrative method for presenting the results is in the form of a map consisting of all the nationalities of the different team members our respondents have worked with. This map is presented below. The colored countries indicate the nationalities that the respondents list.
National differences

The next question associated with the national influences is directly asking for an explanation of how the national cultural diversity can impact group work. Few of the respondents indicate that there is no impact on work coming from the national differences. This answer below is somewhat different than we expected, as one of the respondent states:

“... I think that when people know exactly what their roles in the team are, it does not matter too much where they are from.”

From literature nationality clearly has an impact on a team. Many respondents give specific examples of how particular nationalities behave when it comes to teamwork. These responses have been grouped into categories of different countries together with explanations. This method leads us to further analyze and show how nationalities influence teamwork. The presentation has no aim of trying to stereotype; it is merely to compare the respondents’ experiences to previously presented cultural indicators. Hofstede’s theory will be used as the fundament for this analysis, as it is believed to be the most recognized framework, and since the other value based frameworks can to some degree be compared to Hofstede’s dimensions. Each nationality, where Hofstede’s scores have some relevancy for the analysis, will be followed by tables summarizing the individual ranks of a country compared to world averages. These scores show the tendency of a particular country on each dimension.
Americans

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Figure 15. Hofstede’s scores for USA (Source: Adapted from http://www.geert-hofstede.com/)

There are many comments from the respondents about their experiences working with American team members. Americans are described by some as “very out spoken”, they also tend to be “more open and like to communicate”. High Individuality in American culture leads to this openness in conversations. Highly individualistic nations tend to have a low-context communication style. The characteristics the respondents have experienced of Americans can also be analyzed by the low Uncertainty Avoidance index. This can be seen as they tend to have a greater level of tolerance for different ideas and thoughts, and therefore have open discussions. In relation to their low Uncertainty Avoidance, a statement showing that they do not necessary focus on details can be analyzed. This dimension explains also their high creativity, as it shows that there is a great tolerance for ambiguity. Therefore people are not afraid of presenting their different ideas during teamwork. A respondent also points out another positive feature by working with Americans “you can be sure to get straight feedback, questions etc”. This culture characteristic can be analyzed by Tropenaar’s dimensions. Here the respondent sees his co-worker to be straight and direct to the point, meaning that Americans can be viewed as a Specific culture. Other statements argue that in the USA an informal culture is very common, this can be supported from this statement:

“Americans prefer to make small talk and then discuss the business. In a situation where the two nationalities were in the same meeting, the Danes though the Americans were hiding something because they would not discuss the business right away and the Americans though the Danes were rude because they would not engage in small talk.”

Looking into value-based theories on cultural differences, there is no clear pattern for explaining this statement. However, one could find a reason for such behavior of Americans in terms of team development. It might be that in this particular team, American group members had a higher need in the Forming stage for maintaining relationships among other culturally diverse members in order to build a better functioning work environment. The Danes, on the other hand, immediately adapted to international surroundings and wanted to proceed to task-solving. In addition, Danes, who scored much
lower on Uncertainty Avoidance, feel more comfortable in unfamiliar situations as compared to Americans.

Latin America

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Figure 16. Hofstede’s scores for Latin America, Brazil and Mexico (Source: Adapted from http://www.geert-hofstede.com/)

Examples of Latin American nationalities that the respondents have experience with, are mostly directed towards Mexico and Brazil. However, by Hofstede’s dimensions there is a summary of the scores of all Latin countries presented above, where the differences are assumed not to be very wide. In general Latin Americans are described by the respondents as being very open toward socializing and building friendly relationships with their colleagues. This behavior can be explained by the score from the Individualism–Collectivism dimension. Latin countries tend to be collectivistic; therefore there is a need for a good relationship within the team. Our respondents also believe that Latin nationals are dynamic and full of charisma, which could be explained by their high Uncertainty Avoidance. It shows that people tend to express their emotions more often in countries that scored high on this dimension. They can also have emotional need for being busy at work that could explain their dynamic behavior and charisma. Another interesting characteristic experienced by a respondent as he states:

“... South American can have a tendency to have a more ‘manana manana’ philosophy”.

This reasoning is furthermore noticed by a respondent cooperating with Brazilians, where she explains:

“I thought that if I ask question “can you do it for Monday” and they say “yes” it would be done for Monday. And I was always surprised that the task was not done as agreed. But in fact this person maybe didn’t have time for this task or didn’t know how to do it (and in Brazil you cannot say “no”) so I should rather ask: “how much time will this task take”, “do you need to involve other people to finish the task”, “Could you prioritize my task or do you need more time than until Monday” There is lots of examples like this.”

An explanation for such behaviors is seen, as there is a high Uncertainty Avoidance in Latin countries. There is a great need for strong rules and procedures at work. Therefore, if the rules are not clearly
indicated, if there is no strict procedure for dealing with tasks and no formal negative consequences of not finishing them, people might not be able to complete their work on time.

European Countries

Most of the respondents had some experiences working with European citizens. There are many opinions on cultural influences coming from almost all European countries. In this part of the analysis, countries that have received the highest number of similar evaluations will be presented separately. Those opinions that go under each individually presented country are the most repeated statements, whereas at the end of this part, there will be a short summary of other experiences with European nationalities.

Denmark

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Figure 17. Hofstede’s scores for Denmark (Source: Adapted from http://www.geert-hofstede.com/)

Denmark among other countries is scoring very high on Hofstede’s Individualism dimension. Most of the statements about teamwork with Danes confirm this high score. They have been characterized as being very straight forward and directly giving feedback etc. High Individualism can be seen as each Danish team member tends to openly express their own personal opinions. This high Individualism also means that the task itself is more important than the relationships among team members. Furthermore some people underline that Danes take action immediately, whereas other cultures wait for specific directions for task solving. This is explained by low Uncertainty Avoidance in Denmark. This dimension shows that Danes feel less stressed in ambiguous situations. People often rely on their common sense in task solving, and do need special guidance. An interesting point is noticed as the respondent states:

“Danish team members: language challenge (even though all the Danes I worked with could speak English fluently, they very often ignored the non-Danish speaking members by speaking Danish, also when they were discussing project issues)”

A possible explanation for such behavior could be again the low Uncertainty Avoidance. Danes feel comfortable in ambiguous situations; therefore they possibly do not pay much attention to some societal
rules. This could also be seen as an unconscious behavior, since low Uncertainty Avoidance confirms very high tolerance towards diversity in Denmark.

Germany

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Figure 18. Hofstede’s scores for Germany (Source: Adapted from http://www.geert-hofstede.com/)

Our respondents express most opinions about German co-workers. First major characteristic of teamwork with Germans is that they are disciplined, reliable, serious about their contribution to the project and focused on deadlines. One of the explanations to those features can be seen in the Short Term Orientation dimension of Germans, as their efforts are directed to producing quick results. Germans strict approach to fulfilling deadlines can also be defined as Germany is one of the more Universalist cultures in Trompenaar’s categorization. This is due to their need for rules and procedures. From the same theory, Germany can be seen as a high Achievement culture, which gives explanation to seeing accomplishments, competencies and performance as the most relevant. Germans tend to be very straight forward in their approach. This can be explained by high Individualism. People tend to like direct discussions and are not afraid to speak up during the meetings. The last interesting selected statements are associated with receiving responses from German team members. Our respondents give examples, such as:

“German team members take their time and prefer to not get back to you until they have a final answer.”

“Germans I learned, for example, that some Germans aren't comfortable telephoning in a response to an advertisement; they find it too forward. They will, however, respond to an ad that features a fax number. They'll send in a fax, asking for more information, and will provide their name and phone number so that a company can call them.”

Presented behavior of German team members can be explained by Hall’s theory on contexts. Germans have a low context communication style. This means their verbal messages are explicit and direct. The habit of taking time for a response appears because Germans need their time for considerations about what they want to forward to the receivers.
Italy

Italians in general are described as “really open”, relaxed and creative. They also tend to be “not so concentrated” in teamwork. These characteristics can be explained from Trompenaar’s dimensions, since Italy lies under the category of being more an Affective culture. This means that Italians tend to openly express their feelings and have an easy flow of emotions. Their habit of visible use of gestures can lead one to think that they are more relaxed or not so focused during the teamwork. The same indication could be given by looking at Hall’s theory, where Italians tend to have a high context communication style. They use a lot of nonverbal codes, indirect messages and pay a lot of attention to context. A respondent also mentions that Italians are not so concerned with sticking to a time schedule, and as the other one further explains:

“Try getting an Italian ... to create a timeline for a project and commit to a real deadline that meets the approval of a Scandinavian or a German who is only required to do a team role rather than a lead role. The results are often entertaining or excruciating.”

High-context countries focus a lot on the group binding and relationship building; therefore creating strict timelines might be difficult for Italians.

Other European countries

The culture characteristic of having difficulty with time scheduling is not only seen in the Italian culture. The same indication is given from our respondents working with other southern countries including Spain, Portugal and France. All these nationalities can be categorized into Hall’s high context cultures. This means that getting a job done depends more on the relationships with people, attention to group process and not so much to the goal itself. On the other hand, one respondent points out that Spanish people can be “surprisingly really strict and punctual”. This also leads to confirming that cultural dimensions do not necessary hold for all people from one particular country. It has also been explained before that these theories can only indicate some patterns. It is clear that the cultural dimensions are valuable tools to identify national cultural differences and they serve as a great practical guide when trying to notice patterns in and between cultures. A concluding statement to national differences is that there are no right or wrong cultural values. This is clear as the respondent states:

“Neither a Spanish “manana / it will get done when it gets done” approach nor a German “it must be done like this at this time” approach is wrong, and the end results usually gets delivered more or less on time but it’s rather like Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus!”
It is evident that national cultural differences bring different approaches to a team. All cultures have valuable characteristics that should be seen as highly effective for multicultural teamwork.

Asian countries

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Figure 19. Hofstede’s scores for Asia (Source: Adapted from http://www.geert-hofstede.com/)

The Asian countries that have received some comments from the respondents include China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Philippines etc. Many of the evaluations have been similar, at the same time several respondents indicate their experience with Asian people in general, being not particular country specific. The score for all the Asian countries in Hofstede’s dimensions have been shown as an average in the graph above. The most interesting dimension that differentiates Asia from Western countries is the very high score on Long Term Orientation. Asians look for long-term results, are very careful in using resources and have very strong working aspirations.

Japan

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Figure 20. Hofstede’s scores for Japan (Source: Adapted from http://www.geert-hofstede.com/)

The most considerations among Asian countries have been given to Japan. In general, most of the respondents underline the politeness of Japanese people in the workplace. They also mention, that there are many Western’ behaviors that can be seen as rude in the Japanese culture. A possible explanation for Japanese politeness can be seen from the Long Term Orientation. The main values coming from this orientation include honesty, adaptiveness and self-discipline. People have a strong sense of shame; therefore they could act very neutral in their behavior. Furthermore, strong Uncertainty Avoidance that provides high stress and anxiety in the culture can lead to more precautionous behaviors.
Another point about the Japanese culture has been given based on the experience of an English teacher in Japan, as he states:

“For example, at first in class I would ask the Japanese students a question and no-one would answer, so I thought they didn’t know the answer, then I made the work easier for them. But afterwards the teacher said it is part of Japanese culture to not speak out in front of others. So the students did know the answers, but unless I asked one specific student, no student would offer the answer in front of their classmates. If I’d have known about this before, I wouldn't have made the work easier, instead I’d have directed my questions to individual students.”

In Trompenaar’s classification Japan is a country associated with Ascription. This means that people who hold higher ranks in the organization are treated with more respect. In this example, it is the student – teacher relation where the teacher is superior to the student. Japanese people, as they have a collectivistic tendency in their culture, do not have a natural manner of speaking up in the class or in the workplace. This could have a great influence on the teamwork process, especially if the opinion of Japanese team members is not expressed just by the fact that none have asked for it. Quite a few respondents believe that “Japanese people are very indirect compared with other nationalities”. This characteristic can be explained from Trompenaar as them being a more Diffuse culture. It means that Japanese people are not necessary straightforward when speaking, therefore international team members have to infer some things. Another behavior related to communication in Japan is shown by a statement:

“Japanese member will probably not clearly say yes or no, when asked if they agree to a specific issue in a strategy. You have to find other ways to get them involved and find out what they really think. Japanese will never say “no”, it causes offense, so anyone non-Japanese has to learn that the shades of “yes” are rather like shades of grey, and some Yes’s actually don’t mean yes at all.”

Such behaviors can come from the collectivistic character of the Japanese culture as people avoid direct individual confrontation and they have a tendency of being a high-context culture. This characteristic of their communication style leads team members to take disagreements personal. People are then very sensitive towards conflicts and they try to avoid them. This statement in fact relates not only to indirect communication of Japanese, but also to their politeness.
Learning as a consequence of multicultural teamwork

The last question from the category of national influences has the purpose to investigate what things the respondents have learned from the experience of working in multicultural teams. The respondents list many different issues as a consequence of working in such teams. An in-depth answer given by one of the respondents' shows that learning from multicultural teamwork has a complex set of different gains. These are described as cross-cultural and personal benefits, as well as changing one's mind set:

“If you always lived and worked within the same environment – you tend to find it easy to define what is right and wrong. The more you work within a multicultural environment – the more you are forced to be more open minded and accept that thing can be done different and you have to respect the local culture and traditions to become successful.”

These features mentioned touch upon many different issues seen as the capabilities of team members. An Intercultural Competence Model can give an overview of such capabilities of an effective multicultural team member. These competencies are divided into three components: “sufficient cultural knowledge, skilled actions, and suitable motivation or personality orientation of a member of a multicultural team” (Matveev & Milter 2004: 104). The graphical representation of this model is presented below.

![Intercultural Competence Model](source: Adapted from Matveev & Milter 2004: 106)

We believe this model is a great way of dividing cultural competencies into categories. The majority of the issues listed in the survey are the competencies that can be categorized into these three groups – cultural knowledge, skills and personality orientation.
The first area of competencies - cultural knowledge includes information about culture in general and its particular practices and habits. Team members should acknowledge what are the communication and interaction differences in other cultures (Matveev & Milter 2004). Under this category the respondents underline the importance of accepting the fact that differences among cultures exist. They believe it is beneficial to learn to identify them and adjust one’s own attitude towards the dissimilarities. These ideas are also clearly seen from previous answers. Multicultural teamwork taught the respondents to understand and respect various cultures. It made them “appreciate the capability of the other members” in a multicultural team. They have also learnt how to approach and get closer to people from different nationalities and backgrounds. One of the respondents’ further explains this learning experience and gaining cultural knowledge:

“I learned that each culture should be approached in some specific way…”

Learning this specific way of approaching a culture shows that a team member is prepared for the differences and willing to find effective methods to create a cooperative environment in a team. This knowledge the respondents have already gained can be used in their future work. Another person states what she believes plays a significant role in an effective teamwork:

“To try to understand the different cultures at least with regard to the work we have to do together and know how to deal with the people from different cultures and know how to treat them and their opinions and possible misunderstandings.”

Such willingness to understanding can benefit not only in productive team work, but also in noticing one’s own cultural identity, as the respondent explains what working in a multicultural team gave him:

“I got familiar with other cultures, but also it made me more aware of my own culture, of who I am.”

The second category of cultural competence are skills, which are the appropriate and effective actions seen as competent in a culturally diverse environment. These include the capabilities of team members to understand and have a clear communication flow with different nationals (Matveev & Milter 2004). A summary of the skills listed by the respondents include their increased understanding, tolerance and respect for other differences. The respondents have learnt to be more patient, more confident and flexible at the same time. This flexibility leads to better listening skills of others’ opinions and openness also when making compromises. Some underline the importance of asking more questions, speaking very clearly and making sure all team members follow and understand the message. Almost all the respondents have as a result become more open-minded. In addition, some learnt to take initiative, handle stress better and have improved skills for resolving problematic issues.
The last group of intercultural competencies is the personality orientation. It includes emotional and psychological reactions towards diverse team members, as well as the empathy towards them. Cultural empathy means here “the ability to behave as if one understands the world as others do” (Matveev & Milter 2004: 106). Many of the respondents state that they have learnt this ability of cultural empathy, as one of them explains that his lesson was:

“That we should avoid being ethnocentric and try to understanding what’s behind someone’s opinion. As I mentioned before, what might seem like something completely unreasonable and out of context might be actually very relevant once we understand what’s behind it.”

Another respondent underlines that there are two steps in viewing different cultures. These two are predicting how other people will interpret different contexts and how they might react. For increased empathy, somebody else sees importance in “open communication and soft skills” as the requirement for dealing with different cultures that lead to a better understanding. Lastly, multinational teamwork can teach people that one’s way is not necessary the only effective way to solve a task, as it is explained:

“I’ve become more culturally aware and have discovered that while two people of different nationalities may have two completely different solutions to a problem, both solutions can work equally well.”

All of the things that have been learnt by the respondents have been categorized into three categories of intercultural competence. However, some of the respondents indicate more universal lessons learnt from multicultural teamwork. This is clear from the statement below:

“Working with people of different nationalities also gave me a very positive attitude to the way I look at the world. It gave me hope that if we are all willing enough to cooperate with each other we can all live in peaceful manner. It made me realise that at the very core we are all the same. We are human - we want and deserve to be equally recognised and respected. Such attitude can lead to the conclusion that multicultural work can be very beneficial not only in terms of work itself. It opens peoples’ minds towards diversity all over the world, increases their tolerance and is clearly a great learning experience for all.”
5. CONCLUSION

5.1. The research implications

As the field of multicultural teams is very broad, it is impossible to sufficiently cover all aspects related to this area. We focused on reaching out and creating a picture of the most important influences to multicultural teamwork. There are clearly limitations to the research due to the character of this thesis. However, extensions could be created in other to further elaborate on the topic. The first implication could be introducing thematic coding as a method of interpreting the data. Such analysis would have the capability of showing the linkage between different responses and search for patterns in them. An explanation of this method and particular examples of how this form of coding couple be carried out are shown in the Appendix (Appendix 2). Furthermore, an interesting extension of this research would be to include an investigation of multicultural virtual teams. These refer to team members that do not meet physically, but work multicultural through the use of technological means. Another possibility would be looking not only at national cultural diversity, but including subgroups and diversities within nations. These would allow us to widen our research by adding new perspectives and findings from multicultural teams.

5.2. The influence of national cultural diversity on teamwork

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how national cultural diversity affects multicultural teams. The problem statement was formulated with the focus on such teams, since it was believed to be one of the increasingly popular trends in the contemporary business world and the future for many organizations. The beginning of the thesis established a theoretical foundation for a deeper understanding of the different elements surrounding a multicultural team. Here, the core concepts included in the problem formulation such as a team, culture and diversity were defined. Following this, an examination was carried out of the multiple layers of culture by the representation of Schein’s model, and Adler’s framework on culture showed its connection to behavior, attitudes and values. The theoretical foundation carried out in the thesis had the intention to underline the potential influence of national culture on the teamwork. In order to connect this theoretical base with the reality of multicultural teams, a qualitative research was designed. This was done by creating e-mail interviews in order to reach a worldwide population. These members, working in different professional areas, ranged
from having short-time experience of working in multicultural teams to highly experienced members. An extensive data treatment of the forty-six respondents was conducted in order to grasp the key issues they believed to influence multicultural teams.

Adler’s model on actual team productivity was derived and utilized as the fundament of our thesis. It served to capture the meaning of being in a multicultural team in relation to the productivity, advantages and disadvantages. In general it was shown by scholars that heterogeneous teams had a greater potential of reaching higher results than homogenous teams. The actual productivity of a team was proven to be measured in terms of team performance and effectiveness, where Higgs model was presented to demonstrate how teams could be built and thereby were able to reach high performance. This theoretical explanation was confirmed by the empirical results, which showed that the respondents believed that there was a competitive advantage for businesses and a need in the market for having multicultural perspectives. More than half of the respondents stated that they preferred working in multicultural teams as they recognized the benefits and the high performance that could amount from this type of work. Following Adler’s core framework, other influences on actual productivity was presented by the teams’ relationship to the task and how this relationship changed and developed as teams proceeded to different stages of the teamwork. The majority of the respondents chose the beginning stage as being most sensitive to problems. Here the task productivity was seen as low, this was followed by the explanation based on Tuckman’s theory. Additional features that had influence on multicultural teams were presented as cross-cultural training, the environment, leadership and personnel features. Furthermore, the Multinational Team Theory showed the complexity of these influences and a positive outcome if the team was in balance. Eighty percent of the respondent had not been provided with any cross-cultural training prior to the teamwork. Even though literature showed that this form of training led to greater potential success in teams, it was also clear that multiple organizations assumed that the respondents’ were already in possession of such skills. In practice companies and employees valued experience as an important skill when working with cultures. Additionally, the respondents believed that the national differences were the main factor causing problems in a team, whereas often the other factors also played a role.

From Adler’s theory, potential productivity was seen as the ideal outcome of the teams’ efforts. These were the advantages and benefits of teams. It was proven that these positive influences were the
increased creativity; great mix of skills and the ability to meet the market needs. The respondents overall agreed with Adler’s advantages, they also believed that the positive features had the capability to overweight the negative aspects. The respondents noted the great advantage of having cultures that contributed to different pieces in the puzzle when forming optimal teams. They also saw multicultural teamwork as a journey of cross-cultural learning including personal insight and new innovative ways of performing tasks. It was also proven that the faulty processes of disadvantages and challenges could influence the team in a negative direction by possibly lead them to become dysfunctional. These negative forces especially included miscommunication amounting from misunderstandings in teams. This was caused by the various means of communicating, and whether team members were able to encode and decode messages. Other issues such as attitudes, perceptions and the lack of cultural self-awareness were also listed. The majority of the respondents believed miscommunication was the main disadvantage. Here the MBI model showed that the respondents’ had to master creating maps of cultures, bridging and integrating them. Furthermore Adler’s communication model demonstrated that encoding and decoding messages were key challenges for team members. Other drawbacks such as language problems causing cognitive strain were underlined. The concepts of parochialism and ethnocentrism were also issues found to be highly unfortunate when working cross-culturally. The respondents confirmed that different behaviors could at times work against teams as certain values and attitudes in cultures had influenced their way of behaving. Other issues influencing were cognitive diversity and monochromic verses polychromic cultures. Causes of the problems in diverse teams were proved to be personal, organizational and leadership related. However it was clear that the cultural differences were always a big part of the mix.

It was furthermore concluded by ninety six percent of the respondents thought the lack of cultural understanding contributed to problems in teams. In order to avoid these problems, Higgs model was clearly picturing the answers from the respondents. These included establishing rules, extensive dialogues, increased awareness and understanding. Also, proper preparation, careful team member selection and the importance of team building activities were emphasized. For the investigation of the powerful forces that influenced teams in various aspects, different frameworks were presented. These were: Hofstede, Tropenaar, Schwartz and Hall. They contributed to an understanding of the behavioral dynamics apparent in multicultural teams. This allowed for an examination of diverse cultural
characteristics based on the responses with particular country examples and indicated how national cultures ranged in diverse directions.

Furthermore, the respondents recognized various learned capabilities. The Intercultural Competence Model provided an overview of these gains. These were the increased cultural knowledge, valuable skills and personal gains. The respondents’ additional comments underlined that multicultural teamwork is a great experience. They see the potential of such teams in global organizations, and believe that the national differences are a part of it; therefore one should acknowledge them and increase the understanding of various cultures. National culture highly influences teamwork in multifaceted ways. Both forces of positive and negative dominations are apparent. This is evident by the increased challenges as a result of such work, but by the end of the day the valuable mechanisms are believed to overrule.
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APPENDIX 1.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

WHO ARE WE

Paulina Katarzyna Dylkiewicz and Katrine Toftgaard Knudsen
students of Business Administration and International Management at Aarhus School of Business in Denmark.

WHAT IS THIS FOR

This questionnaire is a vital part in the research towards our bachelor thesis. The research we conduct is about multicultural teamwork.

Your participation in this research is anonymous. All your personal data is confidential. We will not use your name nor company name for any purposes, but only the answers for our analysis.

It consists of 20 open questions, divided into 5 sections.

We highly appreciate your time and effort to help.

Experience with multicultural teams

1. How often have you worked in a multinational team?
   Answer:

2. Which type of project was your multinational team involved in? (product development, marketing strategy,...), and do you think it had influence on the teamwork?
   Answer:

3. Did you know the team members prior working with them?
   Answer:

4. Did the organization prepare you to work within a multicultural team (by providing training, team development session, etc.)? If yes, in what way?
   Answer:
Opinions about multicultural teams

5. Do you prefer working in a multicultural team or with a team composed by members from the same nationality? And why?

Answer:

6. What is the major advantage of working together with people of different nationalities (creativity, limited groupthink, variety of team members’ skills, flexibility, better capabilities of fulfilling market needs …)? And why?

Answer:

7. What are the benefits you have experienced from working in multicultural teams?

Answer:

8. What is the major disadvantage of working with people from different nationalities (miscommunication, lack of cohesiveness, attitudinal and perception issues, the absence of cultural awareness, decision-making issues…)? And why?

Answer:

Problems/ challenges of multicultural teamwork

9. What challenges or problems have you experienced, when working in multicultural teams?

Answer:

10. What stage of the group work process is most sensitive to problems (beginning, middle, end….)?

Answer:

11. If a problem appeared, do you think this was due to national differences, or did it have other reasons (Personality, organizational environment, leadership)?

Answer:

12. Is it possible that a lack of knowledge and understanding of the different cultures caused some of these problems? How?

Answer:
13. From your experience, what are some specific actions team members can do to prevent or solve problems?
Answer:

National influences

14. What is the difference (if any) in the interaction between different nationalities compared to interacting with people from the same nationality?
Answer:

15. Give examples of some nationalities you previously have worked with?
Answer:

16. Have their nationalities/culture had influence on the group work? How?
Answer:

17. What have you learned from the experience of working with people of different nationalities?
Answer:

General questions

18. What is your nationality?
Answer:

19. What is your profession?
Answer:

20. What industry sector do you work in?
Answer:

Do you have any additional comments on the topic of multicultural teamwork?
Answer:

Thank you very much for your answers!

Paulina Dylkiewicz and Katrine Toftgaard
APPENDIX 2.

Examples of using thematic coding

After the summary of our findings and initial interpretation of the data divided into the specific categories, it could be beneficial to see a linkage between different responses. Thematic coding can be utilized for this purpose of cross analyzing the findings. Thematic coding holds the assumption that “in different social worlds or groups different views can be found” (Flick 2006: 307). It can be valuable for our thesis as it serves to examine how these different groups experience, understand and view the world (Flick 2006). Thematic coding has the purpose of guaranteeing comparability in defining topics, and at the same time staying open to different views in relation to those topics. This procedure begins with an analysis of a single case, by taking each of the respondents’ interviews as a single case and analyzing them one by one (Flick 2006). As it is explained “it preserves the meaningful relations that the respective person deals with in the topic of the study, which is why a case study is done for all cases” (Flick 2006: 308). We have already used open coding for the summary of the results, axial and selective coding helped in the analysis of the answers. The supporting direction is the use of selective coding as the following procedure. Here, this type of coding allows creating thematic groups and categories for the single case, and then by cross-check carrying our analysis of further cases (Flick 2006). In general, the procedure of thematic coding aims ‘at developing a theory starting from the distribution of perspectives on a certain issue or process’ (Flick 2006: 310).

We have decided to slightly alter this method and based on thematic coding create our own method of developing these theories for analysis. We have chosen to generate examples as a set of conclusions derived from an analysis of single case, and further on show multiple cases from thematic coding. The table below shows the possible relations between particular questions that create some patterns in the answers. Each pattern is followed by an example with a short explanation of how these relations could have been explained. Such analysis would be possible as an extension to our research. Some of the responses in the research might be incomplete for such an extensive analysis, however many of the respondents indicated their willingness to participate in a follow up of their surveys. Therefore in the analysis of patterns, such a follow up could contribute to the more in-depth explanation of different tendencies in the responses.
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<td>influence</td>
<td>The preference on heterogeneous over homogenous teams Q5</td>
<td>The respondents with small experience prefer working in homogenous teams (are afraid of multicultural work) / prefer to work in heterogeneous teams (are curious, willing to experience such work). The respondents with big experience prefer homogenous teams (are put off by the challenges they experienced) / prefer heterogeneous teams (have learnt the correct approach in order to be successful).</td>
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<td>Gained cross-cultural training (bigger experience) Q4</td>
<td>lead to different choice of</td>
<td>The reasons of problems in multicultural team (national differences, personality, leadership etc.) Q11</td>
<td>The respondents with big experience list a particular factor as the main cause (they have the biggest experience to be right in their choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing the other team members Q3</td>
<td>influence</td>
<td>What are the specific actions team members can do to prevent or solve problems Q13</td>
<td>The respondents with big experience list more effective actions (again they have better practice in problem prevention and solution by their experience).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The preference of heterogeneous teams over homogenous teams Q5</td>
<td>influences the choice of</td>
<td>The most sensitive stage to problems of the group work process Q10</td>
<td>The respondents, who know other team members prior teamwork, chose later stages or none at all (their familiarity simplifies teamwork processes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advantages/benefits of multicultural teamwork Q6 &amp; Q7</td>
<td>impacts the list of</td>
<td>The advantages/benefits of multicultural teamwork Q6 &amp; Q7</td>
<td>The respondents who prefer heterogeneous teams list more advantages/benefits as members who prefer homogenous teams (choice bias). The respondents who prefer heterogeneous teams list more advantages/benefits over disadvantages/challenges (Q8 &amp; Q9).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>