THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND COGNITIVE DIVERSITY ON CROSS-BORDER TEAMS

A MICRO-ANALYSIS OF A HIGHER EDUCATION SETTING

MELANIE EBNER & MARTINA GAISCH

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INTRODUCTION

• Ever-growing globalisation and demographic change
  • Intercultural communication & cross-border cooperation
  • Increasingly vital in today’s world

• Culture: different worldviews
  • Ambiguity and misunderstandings
  • More resources available; more creative solutions

• Major challenges in intercultural project teams
  • How to constructively use these differences
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• Which **challenges** does cooperation in cross-border project groups bring along?

• Which factors are necessary to enable **successful intercultural cooperation** and to use demographic and cognitive diversity as a resource?
LITERATURE REVIEW

AND DEFINITIONS
DIVERSITY

• “the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something;”
  (Cambridge Dictionary, 2014)

• Heterogenity, variety, difference

• Tries to identify ways in which a connection is possible by understanding each other, pointing out the similarities and encompassing acceptance and respect.
  (Sievert, 2014)
HEAD WHEEL

- Holistic perspective on diversity at the tertiary level

- **Demographic diversity**
  - Race & ethnicity

- **Cognitive diversity**
  - Value structures
  - Knowledge structures

- **Disciplinary diversity**
  - Interdisciplinarity
  - Transdisciplinarity
  - Exchange of subject-specific expertise & perspectives

- **Functional diversity**
- **Institutional diversity**

(Gaisch & Aichinger, 2016)
• „the collective programming of the mind“

(Hofstede, 2001, S.9)

• Concept that deals with traditional ideas and values which are passed on from generation to generation through symbols and communication

(Kroeber & Kluckholm, 1952)

• Structured way of thinking, feelings and actions that were given to people through experiences or knowledge of previous generations.

(Rammer, 2016)
- Comparison of different cultures
- Differences understood & acknowledged
- Dominant culture - „the norm“

- Individual change

(https://www.springinstitute.org/whats-difference-multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication/)
TEAMS

• groups of people “who come together to achieve certain results or performance goals”
  
  (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2008, p. 22)

TEAMWORK

• Is a process
  • “where two or more employees interact interdependently toward a common and valued goal or objective, and who have each been assigned specific roles or functions to perform”
  
  (Ellis & Bell, 2005, p. 641)
CROSS-BORDER TEAMWORK

• Due to their cultural background people make **assumptions** about the way things **should be**. This can influence their behavior.

  (Adler, 2002)

• Promoted by higher education institutions
  • Widen the students’ horizon
  • Open minds to different cultural perspectives -> more tolerant

  (Burdett, 2014)

• Barriers:
  • Direct vs. indirect communication
  • Troubles with accents and fluency
  • Different attitudes toward hierarchy
  • Conflicting decision making norms

  (Brett, Behfar and Kern, 2006)
GLOBE STUDY

• “Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness”
• Largest cross-cultural research on culture and leadership

• 9 DIMENSIONS:
  • Performance Orientation
  • Uncertainty Avoidance
  • Power Distance
  • Gender Egalitarianism
  • Humane Orientation
  • In-Group Collectivism
  • Institutional Collectivism
  • Future Orientation
  • Assertiveness
The Impact of Demographic and Cognitive Diversity on Cross-Border Teams
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(GLOBE Foundation, 2016; Walther, 2006, p. 27-40;)

Performance Orientation

Range: Practices

Average of GLOBE Group Scores

A  Anglo Group
E  Eastern Europe
G  Germanic Europe
L  Latin Europe
N  Nordic Europe

(GLOBE Foundation, 2016; Walther, 2006, p. 27-40;)

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STUDY
METHODOLOGY

• Semi-structured interviews
  • General information: age, gender, nationality
  • Open questions

• Participants
  • Universitat Politecnica, Valencia
  • EPS, WS 2016/17
    • 49 students
    • 10 nationalities
    • 10 projects
    • 3-6 persons per team
PARTICIPANTS

- 10 interviews

- 32 - 52 min (Ø 43)

- 5 female
- 5 male

- 20 - 26 years (Ø 21.7)

- 8 different nationalities
  - Denmark, Germany, England, Finland, France, Netherlands, Austria, Poland

- Diverse fields of studies
  - Communication & Multimedia Design, Infrastructure Construction Management, Media Technology, Global Business Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Mechatronics, Product Design
ANALYSIS

- Transcription
- Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

7 Categories
- General Teamwork
- Performance Orientation
- Uncertainty Avoidance and Future Orientation
- In-group collectivism
- Power Distance
- Humane Orientation
- Assertiveness
## 4.1 General Teamwork

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<td>cooperative work instead of collaboration (efficiency and speed)</td>
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### FINDINGS - GENERAL TEAMWORK

#### 4.1 General Teamwork

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“Sometimes there were a view communication problems with the guys from France. Because in the beginning they were from the level a bit lower so it was hard for them to express what they wanted to say.”

(Interview 4)

“It started still a little bit difficult because of the language barrier. Sometimes we found out that not everyone understood what we thought they understood.”

(Interview 1)
## 4.2 Performance Orientation

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<tr>
<td>Latin Europe</td>
<td>take breaks frequently, importance of project behind relationships and enjoying life</td>
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Sub teams formed in which representatives of different cultural clusters which had similarly high/low value for Performance Orientation grouped together.
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“In the middle of the meeting we just take a break and have a coffee or we talk... yeah like friends.” (Interview 7)

“For me it’s not necessary to be the best, in the middle level is fine for me.” (Interview 3)

“We just picked the person that is best in the task and let them do it. Because that is the fastest way.” (Interview 1)

“We are not as ambitious as they are. They really want this to be perfect and the best project ever but we are like – of course we want it to be good but it doesn’t have to be perfect.” (Interview 3)
### 4.3 Uncertainty Avoidance and Future Orientation

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<th>Region</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Future Orientation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Germanic Europe, Nordic Europe</td>
<td>high Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>strong desire for structure, big amount of planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Europe, Eastern Europe</td>
<td>rather and very low Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>trial and error method to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germanic Europe, Nordic Europe</td>
<td>extremely high Future Orientation</td>
<td>a lot of planning ahead, much effort put into events scheduled in the future, business before pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe, Latin Europe</td>
<td>lower Future Orientation</td>
<td>right balance between work and pleasure important</td>
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### 4.4 In-group Collectivism

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>In-group Collectivism</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe, Latin Europe</td>
<td>very high In-group collectivism</td>
<td>great loyalty and sense of attachment to group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic Europe</td>
<td>very low In-group collectivism</td>
<td>strong individualism, task-orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germanic Europe, Anglo Group</td>
<td>slightly higher In-group collectivism</td>
<td>high Individualism but surface-level relationships, kind of collectedness to group</td>
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</tbody>
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### 4.5 Power Distance

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<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority in general</td>
<td>no official project manager, responsibilities in accordance to existing knowledge bases of students, different tasks and distribution of roles and power naturally evolved in projects, very little dissatisfaction due to unequal distribution of power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic Europe</td>
<td>very low Power Distance</td>
<td>difficulty in accepting authorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.6 Humane Orientation

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Humane Orientation</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Eastern Europe</td>
<td>low Humane Orientation</td>
<td>focus on completing tasks, rather neutral relationship with other group members, no rewards for being kind or generous to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic Europe</td>
<td>very high Humane Orientation</td>
<td>fairness and being kind to others had very high priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Third culture”</td>
<td></td>
<td>all people in Erasmus community, friendly relationships rated as most crucial, students would have behaved differently in this multicultural project if it had taken place in their home country, separation of life spheres did not play such a crucial role</td>
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### 4.7 Assertiveness

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<tr>
<td>Directness in general</td>
<td>something positive, good to have an opinion, discrepancy in perception of assertiveness (form of directness)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germanic Europe</td>
<td>very high Assertiveness</td>
<td>very decisive, direct, and even aggressive when interacting with other group members, individuals presented own views or placed own needs before those of other group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic Europe</td>
<td>very low Assertiveness</td>
<td>also expressed their opinions, always tried to be respectful and not to hurt the feelings of the other group members</td>
</tr>
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LIMITATIONS

• Qualitative study
  • small sample size
  • not representative

• Important not to think in stereotypes
  • small group of participants
  • questioned at 1 point of the project

• Researcher’s culture
  • bias
  • interviewer effect
  • personal involvement
• **Demographic diversity**
  - people not aware of differences
  - think that all cultures are similar (EU)
  - blind to own cultural coding

• **Cognitive & disciplinary diversity**
  - perceived strongly
  - own methods & patterns
  - differences = disruptive
    - working style, background knowledge

• **Lack of diversity sensitive management**
  - ressources of diversity not used
THANK YOU!
GLOBE STUDY – VALUES FOR DIMENSIONS 1/2

Power Distance

Humane Orientation

Assertiveness

Uncertainty Avoidance

(GLOBE Foundation, 2016; Walther, 2006, p. 27-40;)

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In-group Collectivism

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