UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Master Thesis in Strategic HRM and Labour Relations

MULTICULTURAL TEAMWORK AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

- An exploratory case study of a Swedish workplace

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Semester: Spring 2023

Abstract

Thesis:	30 higher education points
Master Program:	Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester/year:	Spring Semester 2023
Supervisor:	Thomas Jordan
Examiner:	Ylva Wallinder
Report no:	
Keywords:	Multicultural communication/collaboration, diversity management, cross-cultural leadership, intercultural competence, adaptation, personality traits

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to explore and understand the processes of collaboration and communication among culturally diverse teams and investigate the outcomes of this association, as perceived from the team members' and managers' perspectives. Understanding the origins of those events could be instrumental for organizations to help them distinguish more complicated aspects of struggles in multicultural cooperation.

Theory: The theoretical framework consists of two components. Firstly, the Intercultural Competence (IC) model by Matveev & Milter (2004) will be followed as a guide to investigate competencies and differences in the participants' answers. Secondly, the pyramid model of Intercultural Competence by Deardorff (2006) will be used to interpret this study's results and the factors of internal and external outcomes of IC will be taken into account as the goal is to include individual perceptions of multicultural collaboration and cultural competence.

Method: A qualitative study was carried out based on 13 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with an exploratory and interpretative approach. The interviews were 13 consisting of 9 team members of culturally diverse teams, their 3 managers in charge, and 1 HR informant. Results from an internal employee survey conducted by the company in 2022 were used as secondary data.

Results: By following the purpose of this study, challenges and opportunities in daily communication and collaboration among team members were presented. The perceptions of interviewees revealed correlations between personality attitudes, cultural knowledge, and individual skills. The outcomes of this association showed that many of the desired internal and external outcomes exist in the case company's work environment.

Acknowledgement

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1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Given the uncertainty of the business world and the effort of engaging diverse generations in 2023, many companies around the world have been advocating to establish inclusive and respectful work environments in an attempt to represent the full spectrum of talents in the market. The globalized working environment altered the dynamics of diverse employment and brought rising numbers of multiculturalism into the work teams of organizations, creating a more heterogeneous working environment. Multicultural individuals generally identify with two or more cultures and are a part of the multicultural aspect of an organization which carries multiple dimensions of social, organizational, and work-related patterns (Fitzsimmons, 2013). For this study, the term multicultural teams will be used in an effort to include team members' nationalities, countries of origin, and previous multicultural experiences in analyzing their collaboration methods and interactions. According to Fitzsimmons (2013), these individuals could have acquired their cultures due to being foreign-born, immigrated, or due to multicultural marriages being held. Although the identification of the differences among these concepts has been widely discussed in previous research, group communication and collaboration processes, as well as their contribution to the organization, have been less investigated (Fitzsimmons, 2013; Konrad, 2003). Konrad (2003) critically examined the strategies that were followed in previous American research regarding workplace diversity and concluded that international aspects of literature are an important addition to gaining a global impression of the contribution made by multicultural teams.

Productive diversity and the role of group identities will constitute vital facets of this research while addressing the faultlines noticed in multicultural communication (Bertone & Leahy, 2003). Through this thesis, the structuring and definition of a multicultural workforce as affected by these diverse group entities and their country of origin will be examined from an up-to-date perspective, and by doing this, their advantageous or disadvantageous perspectives on the organization will be explored. Drawing upon these aspects of diverse collaboration, and aiming to enhance the most recent relevant literature, the study will build on multicultural understanding by exploring adaptation practices and means of adjustment to new communication styles while considering the opinions both of team members and managers in charge. These participants will have the chance

to express their voices and, if applicable, compare their working routines with the ones in their country of origin and the differences and similarities that might lie beneath.

1.2 Background

People around the world have access to new experiences thanks to cross-cultural encounters. These encounters and their culturally diverse nature have an effect on social relationships which can be shaped by following a "*subjective culture*" (Triandis et al., 1972, as cited in Triandis, 1977, p. 153) allowing the multicultural interpersonal aspect of communication to be present (Triandis, 1977). When mentioning "*subjective culture*", Triandis et al. (1977) referred to perceived values, norms, and idiosyncracies that might connect the individual world and perspective with the cultural and social one. When the interpersonal aspect of communication is brought to a multicultural relationship with different norms of socially acceptable interactions, then misunderstandings might occur. As stated by Fiedler et al., (1971, as cited in Triandis, 1977, p.154) "*culture assimilators*" can be proven as helpful in those cases as they can raise the levels of isomorphic attributions (attributions that have more similarities with the host or one's own culture) and aid in understanding different viewpoints of one's own culture. These "*culture assimilators*" would be trained to understand other cultures, to reinforce inclusivity in interpersonal interactions while avoiding stereotypical assumptions (Triandis, 1977). The configuration of effective interactions among those social relationships relies on the participants' abilities to properly use their social skills and navigate through the ambiguities of cross-cultural differences (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Furnham & Bochner (1982, as cited in Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004), argued that one's capability of interacting meaningfully among different cultures could be affected by the presence of previous cultural knowledge and the current information regarding the new culture or country, along with the personal intention to adapt to the new cultural environment by adjusting some aspects of one's current cultural identity.

Intercultural research has emphasized the importance of conceptualizing culture in the workplace. In today's globalized workplace, work realities are increasingly correlated across borders, as companies aim to expand into new markets and engage with individuals throughout the world (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). Business entities and individuals have been extensively discussed in the early research literature as the foundation of organizational studies in the fields of working environment, organizational performance, business ethics, and behavioural management (Sekerka,

Comer & Godwin, 2014). The need to establish innovative businesses consisting of competent employees has become a part of organizational change with the fundamental focus being on creating a positive place to work (Stevens, Plaut & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Present working environments require that human resources are increasingly diversified, respecting gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and any other form of personal identity, in an attempt to construct an inclusive representation of the employees and reinforce organizational efficiency (Ely & Thomas, 2001). The research of Müller, Spang & Ozcan (2009) on Germany's and Sweden's multicultural project teams, has focused on their decision-making processes and concluded that their chosen styles were affected by team members' personality characteristics. In their study, the Swedish teams also appeared to be less formal, more transparent and open-minded, while the German teams followed a more goal-oriented management style with clearly distinguished responsibilities.

Hunt, Layton & Prince (2015), elaborated on the project from McKinsey & Company under the name "*Diversity Matters*". McKinsey & Company is a global management consulting firm and this particular research was based on data and demographics from hundreds of their public partner companies. Through this project, they have demonstrated how gender and ethnic diversity correlated with better financial performance, as companies with higher percentages of racial/ethnic diversity were found to be more likely (by 35%) to achieve better financial results. In addition to that, processes such as decision-making and innovation seemed to be positively affected by ethnic diversity because of the broad and challenging nature of experiences those employees held. Diversity is not a new trend in the field of human resource management. Individuals have constantly been identifying with diverse representations of social and ethnic backgrounds as well as with personal & professional cultures both in society and the workplace environment. Diversity has acquired several definitions over the years and for the interest of this study, a standard system of interpretations will not be followed as the aim is to analyze this research's results from a new angle. This research study will delve into the cultural aspect of diversity considering cultural behaviours and viewpoints within multicultural working teams, consisting of members of different nationalities.

Cultural diversity in organizations, if properly managed, can result in major benefits both for the employees and the business goals of a company (Martin, 2014; Mazur, 2010). For these areas to

prosper, employees' well-being, equity & inclusion practices along with diversity management should be taken into account, whilst considering the role and effect of leadership in each case.

1.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and understand the processes of collaboration and communication among culturally diverse teams and investigate the outcomes of this association, as perceived from the team members' and managers' perspectives. From now on, when there will be a reference to the participants' diverse cultural backgrounds, it will be connected mainly with their different countries of origin and the different countries within which they had previous working experience. There is ample evidence indicating the challenges and strengths of multicultural teams and how they can influence organizational culture and relationship management (Dibble & Gibson, 2013; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Katz & Flynn, 2013; Leung & Wang, 2015; Pasca & Wagner, 2012). Understanding the origins of those challenges could be instrumental for organizations to help them distinguish more complicated aspects of struggles in multicultural cooperation by extending the variety of cultural values beyond the collectivistic and individualistic models (Pasca & Wagner, 2012). Research on diversity in organizations presents numerous opportunities for further study whilst explicitly stating that challenges tend to create opportunities (Fine, 1996). Moreover, it would be easier to approach potential challenges from a broader and richer base of experience when diverse groups are involved and in that way, diversity management could also facilitate problem-solving and decision-making strategies as stated in previous studies (Cox & Blake, 1991; Matveev & Nelson, 2004). Because of those diverse perspectives, a multicultural team could benefit from the variety of its members and potentially advance its team's creativity and overall performance (Leung & Wang, 2015; Vora et al., 2019). The study's research questions are presented below:

How do members of multicultural teams experience communication and collaboration in the given workplace? Are there challenges and opportunities related to cultural differences as described from their perspectives?

How have cultural knowledge and personal skills influenced the team members' interaction styles and behaviours in the experience of working with a culturally diverse group?

2 Previous research

2.1 Literature Review

In this section, a review of previous relevant literature will be presented to discover the challenges and benefits that have been presented regarding collaboration in multicultural teams. In the interest of this case study, the individual and group approach will be mentioned as well as aspects of communication styles and management strategies within those diverse teams. Intercultural and multicultural studies were widely researched by academia and the business community concerning cultural variances, organizational success and underlying values and behaviours of members involved. This previous knowledge and concepts have been of substantial assistance to this study's research and focus.

2.1.1 Multicultural Individuals & Teams

Within the domain of cultural studies, terms such as culture, cultural awareness, cultural competence and cultural safety are often referred to as the main principles of cross-cultural education and understanding. One way of exploring these definitions is to ascertain the previous experiences and current standpoints of multicultural team members. Multicultural individuals are considered to be people identifying with or internalizing two or more different cultures (Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander & Maznevski, 2010; Fitzsimmons, 2013). There has been an extensive discussion regarding the meaning of the terms biculturalism and multiculturalism and how those two depart from each other. For the sake of this study, the term multiculturalism will be primarily used as it covers a wider and more generic part of the respective literature. Elaborating further on the individual level of multiculturalism, Vora et al., (2019) followed a universalist approach that considered the differences among individual experiences and behaviours when it came to processes such as adaptation and acculturation. Acculturation was defined as the result of embracing one or more new cultures (Sam & Berry, 2010). The psychological level that connects someone moving from their familiar cultural background to an unknown environment with new signs and methods of social intercourse, has been described as the stage of *"cultural shock"* and was originally defined by Kalervo Oberg (1954).

The process of exploring the previous research required a combination of searches in the sectors of anthropology, sociology and psychology. To learn, classify and explain the layers of

multicultural identities, factors such as social relations, national structures and policies and cultural adjustment have been looked at. Sam & Berry (2010) have concluded that personal characteristics might support or affect the perceptions and judgements of individuals resulting in major variations in cultural learning, cultural transition and intercultural communication styles.

A group consisting of people coming from diverse cultural backgrounds engaging towards a common goal has been defined as an aspect of the multicultural resources of an organization (Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander & Maznevski, 2010). Berry and Kalin (1995, as cited in Verkuyten & Brug, 2004) questioned the teams' reasons for supporting multiculturalism as they sometimes aim to profit from it rather than engage with the group's true interests. From another perspective, these culturally diverse work groups were classified into different demographic dimensions by researchers and more importantly, these dimensions were studied further in order to determine their impact on critical business functions (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt & Jonsen (2010), conducted a meta-analysis on team diversity and its effects on group and organizational performance. Through this study, they have emphasized the complication of accurately defining culture by respecting and including all of its depth while also testing how theories of similarity-attraction and social identity influenced multicultural teams and their effectiveness. Summarizing their study, they concluded that culturally diverse teams could be described both as a benefit and a concern for organizations, depending on the management mechanisms that are followed and on the working conditions that are present each time. They referred to the benefits of these diverse teams in terms of bridging gaps in communication and engagement, developing social capital and team creativity as well as creating strong leaders with global identities. On the other hand, they referred to them as a concern in terms of maintaining cohesion and trust, creating an inclusive and satisfying climate as well as regulating potential task conflicts and divergent processes.

2.1.2   *Communication & Collaboration among Culturally Diverse Teams*

Lauring & Selmer (2012), argue that international organizations and international diversity are still characterized as inconclusively researched. This inconclusiveness relies on the aspects of homogeneity and heterogeneity in the workplace as a result of diverse working realities and challenges that could lead to opposing conclusions (Lauring & Selmer, 2012). According to their study, this inconclusiveness is originating from vague conclusions of past research on multicultural

organizations and they support the idea that human resources are still in need of complementary knowledge on culturally diverse work groups. Sawyerr, Strauss, & Yan (2005, as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2012) assumed that if the attitude towards different individuals is benevolent, in comparison to someone's own values and beliefs, then the outcomes of diverse group collaboration will be advantageous as well. Several studies have investigated the benefits of multicultural teamwork and its effects on group creativity. Tadmor et al., (2012), after taking into account the hypothesis that individual group members are more creative because of their multicultural experiences, have indicated that a group's shared creativity should be higher too. Nonetheless, their conclusion stands on each group member's experiences and competencies which can vary considering the relations and interactions one might carry throughout their life. The impact of those experiences in relation to the individualism-collectivism perspective within a group has been analyzed by Boros et al., (2010) when trying to elaborate on struggles for cooperation amid multicultural workgroups. They argued that assessing only this perspective at the individual level and then aiming to connect its results with the group attitude would not be adequate as cultural values constantly configure the team's composition and in this way also its cooperation efforts.

Internal crisis communication has been a concern both for multinational companies and for companies with culturally diverse workforces (Ravazzani, 2016). The former companies aim to guide direct contacts by introducing a common corporate language for the benefit of organizational effectiveness and strategy alignment (Van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010), while the latter should integrate such an approach for enhancing a unified form of communication and for making the working environment more flexible for its employees (Matveev & Nelson, 2004; Ravazzani, 2016). Ravazzani (2016), also refers to the components of internal communication in a culturally diverse environment and points out the importance of establishing communication channels while recognizing the manifold multicultural voices. According to her, internal crisis communication relies on the interactions among managers and employees affected by an organizational or societal crisis which might disturb the effectiveness of shared collaboration and eventually lead to communication failures. At this stage of reviewing the academic bibliography, and the research of Matveev & Nelson (2004) in specific, it seemed necessary to indicate the uncertainty and possible relevance of their study. Although the relationship among their variables was proven to be significant, it was focused on a sample of American and Russian managers and contributed to the enhancement of managerial training. According to them, the primary purpose of developing cross-

cultural communication competence is to meet the dynamic demands of an international workplace and to unravel the individual potential of each team member (Matveev & Nelson, 2004). For this thesis study, both sides of multicultural teams will be considered concerning team members and managers respectively.

Despite the fact that modern collaboration routines & guidelines along with management systems could be implemented within these teams, challenges and conflicts might still arise. The effects of the external environment and the social and political changing circumstances cannot be predicted by organizations and therefore, as in any other form of collaboration, a fluid nature of misunderstandings lies beneath multicultural collaboration as well (Dibble & Gibson, 2013). A variety of factors could lead to those misunderstandings and later on possibly to workplace conflicts too as individuals tend to have disparate expectations and needs combined with the instability of a competitive and evolving working environment (Darling & Fogliasso, 1999).

2.1.3 Challenges & Adaptations in Multicultural Teamwork

After discussing communication and collaboration among culturally diverse teams, substantial challenges have been noticed in terms of decision-making, cooperation and adaptation. Besides the variation noticed in interaction and communication styles, perceptions of multicultural teamwork could be influenced by difficulties in understanding accents and by the lack of fluency in every language as well as by differing attitudes toward management and authority (Brett, Behfar & Kern, 2006). These conflicting approaches require analysis and involvement of managerial time in order to adapt to the challenges they might be facing and adjust the team's attitudes without affecting their overall performance and participation (Brett et al., 2006). Adaptation can be difficult, creative and respectful at some times depending on the group members' intentions and objectives.

Most research has focused on acculturation and its connection with adaptation in multicultural teamwork which was then divided into psychological and sociocultural transformation (Hui, Chen, Leung & Berry, 2015). During the process of acculturation, both the immigrant team members and the team members of the host country, experience changes in their daily processes and the intergroup relations and expectations. Hui et al., (2015), mentioned that integration leads to more effort for adaptation from the immigrant group rather than the group in the host country and supported that this happens due to the need for recognition and acceptance. Previous studies have

tried to link adaptation strategies with the endorsement of multiculturalism while pointing out the benefits originating from this process both for a multicultural team and also for society as a whole (Ward & Leong, 2006 as cited in Hui et al., 2015).

The stress originating from acculturation and the uncertainty this process brings might generate difficulties in the social and professional aspects of each working individual. The social skills arising through this process could be successfully implemented in an effort to effectively overcome differing cultural networks and include numerous angles of diversity (Crisp & Turner, 2011). As outlined in this chapter, social and cultural diversity behoves the extension of stereotypical categorization of cultural processes and asks for cognitive adaptation to multicultural experiences and interactions. According to Crisp & Turner (2011), adaptation generates development, and when that occurs along with motivation and the ability to focus on the process, organizational diversity and acceptance can be promoted and retained.

2.1.4   *Diversity Leadership*

Cultural diversity in the workplace is manifested through individual behaviours, corporate policies and interpretations of those practices. To manage this diversity efficiently, most organizations start engaging with their multicultural aspect by educating their employees and encouraging attendance to training or communication learning activities (Parvis, 2003).

Team leadership processes and structures usually focus on team effectiveness and goal-setting progress. These processes are commonly heading toward team success by focusing either on team members' attitudes or on the structure of their interactions (Tröster, Mehra & Van Knippenberg, 2014). The exchange of information and coordination of group tasks tend to be prioritized when concentrating on the management of diversity in group performance and networking. Morgeson, DeRue & Karam (2010) approach the understanding of leadership from a functional view. They conceptualize the formality of leadership and its dimension that reflects on team members while emphasizing that the group's responsibilities are a key aspect of defining the team's mission and performance. Recent research has deconstructed this formality as the disposition of each team has the power to influence the leadership styles in accordance with the demands and strategies of the company. Zander & Butler (2010) discuss various styles of leadership and their effect on daily working routines. Part of the styles mentioned in their article refers to team leadership and its focus on organizational success, to single leadership and its relation to team performance, and last but

not least, to rotated and paired leadership and their connection to unexpected events and cooperation. They complete their reasoning by highlighting that in order to match each team's aptitudes, multicultural team composition should be the driving force for leaders when deciding upon their proper leading genre. This conclusion along with previous findings of existing literature (Holmes et al., 2021; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021; Wang, Cheng, Chen & Leung, 2019) set the foundation for a new era of diversity leadership where the team members can be the decision-makers.

Nguyen & Umemoto (2009) refer to cross-cultural knowledge management and how this might bring new suggestions to managers' beliefs and value systems, as they recognize the distinct values of a diverse cultural environment and the ambiguity this involves. To build a strategy that is based on these distinct values, appreciation of differences, transparent working environments as well as knowledge and communication advice to avoid misinterpretations will be needed (Nguyen & Umemoto, 2009). Adopting leading-edge policies when managing diversity is a necessity. Studies on productivity and organizational change within heterogeneous teams have shown that improving management could result in competitive advantage and lower turnover rates (Cox & Blake, 1991).

2.1.5   *Gaps in Previous Research*

Chin, Desormeaux & Sawyer (2016) proposed a framework for diversity leaders and authentic practices while counting on a global mindset to leverage personal and social identities. It is one thing to be open towards receiving training and cross-cultural education but it is another thing to be curious about the conscious and unconscious biases that exist and impact our mindset. When this skill development and cultural competency will be considered an organizational priority, then an inclusive working climate might be likely to succeed. Drawing from their conclusion, current gaps in relevant research have been identified regarding diversity leadership in addition to the absence of contemporary models or theories to be applied in practice (Chin, Desormeaux & Sawyer, 2016). Multicultural workplaces and diverse leaders should not follow standardised, universal strategies. Another area in need of further research has been the complexity of personality traits and how those might affect direct relationships without being related to cultural backgrounds. Cultural differences might affect strategies, reactions and expressions of emotions according to Matsumoto (2006), but group differences originating from personality traits would still contribute to the process of communication and relationship building. Early research on

intercultural competence and culture has pointed out the effect of contextual factors on multicultural relationships and the importance of members' interactions for constructing this competence (Collier, 2015). Adding attention to intercultural competence, the gaps in the literature for assessing its importance and transparency are various while its contingent outcomes regarding diversity, equity and inclusion are not extensively discussed. This exploratory paper aims to analyze these theories and perceptions of multicultural collaboration by connecting them with the theoretical frameworks stated in the next chapter of this study while supporting the idea that each organization should customize their set of policies considering their employees' backgrounds, expectations and needs.

3 Theory

This section will elaborate on the chosen theoretical frameworks of intercultural communication competence. The relevance of this present study is analysed in comparison to each framework and the components of the models are further discussed.

3.1 Intercultural Communication Competence

The value of developing intercultural communication competence has been acknowledged by several researchers (Deardorff, 2011; Leung, Ang & Tan, 2014; Matveev & Nelson, 2004; Taylor, 1994) as a way to understand perspectives, adapt to existing concepts of heterogeneity and shape behaviours while decoding signs from different cultures (Beamer, 1992). Before moving forward with the exploration of the theory in intercultural communication competence (ICC), it is essential to explain the meaning of competence and the meaning of ICC more specifically.

In some instances, human resource management has used competency-based models in the past and communication tools in order to direct the strategy within an organization and measure the performance of the employees. Many definitions were introduced over the years, such as a set of problem-solving skills with the ability to understand dimensions of culture, to use the knowledge and adapt to challenges brought by cultural dynamics and finally, to recognize the routines existing in this process to accommodate diverse groups (Whaley & Davis, 2007). Taylor (1994) defined intercultural competence not only as the ability to efficiently communicate among cultures but also as the degree to which individuals perceive and think of one another. Given the discussion regarding the intercultural context and the difficulties in achieving communication competence, Hammer, Nishida & Wiseman (1996), referred to ICC mainly as cultural understanding and as the degree to which communicators have favourable impressions of each other. However, in this study, we will benefit from the reasoning of Chouhan & Srivastava (2014). According to them, it is the combination of capabilities that constitutes high job performance, which is ultimately an indicator of competency. Different kinds of competence are present in the business environment and may be classified as individual traits and skills or as leadership processes and abilities. Chouhan & Srivastava (2014), refer to a plethora of those skills with the most critical ones being managerial competencies, technical knowledge and behavioural or communication qualifications. After specifying the essence of competence, organizational researchers have argued about how this might influence multicultural team performance and communication. Matveev & Nelson (2004)

while trying to relate the variables of national culture orientations with cross-cultural communication competence and team performance, concluded that this competence might increase the possibility of achieving significant levels of team performance. Moreover, they discussed that this form of learning about multicultural communication could lead to an improvement in leadership qualifications, in terms of problem-solving and decision-making.

Intercultural communication competence has been conceptualized in different ways and models by previous researchers and common ground has not been established when it comes to comprehending the dimensions and dynamics of its process. Dimensions such as country-specific rules, understanding of businesses and personal cultures, theoretical foundations and transformations through change have been indicated as compatible with the learning/growth approach to ICC (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Hammer et al., 1996; Matveev & Milter, 2004; Taylor, 1994; Varner, 2000). Finally, to successfully investigate and potentially change the current assumptions and working circumstances in the multicultural business environment, a combination of competence models will be followed and compared with the employees' attitudes. This analysis will examine if the continuum of cultural awareness is intercultural competence and how can this be influenced by the dimensions of the theoretical models presented later on in this chapter.

3.1.1   *Intercultural Competence Model by Deardorff*

Deardorff (2006) approached Intercultural Competence (IC) from a developmental perspective and designed the following concept of IC in order to offer guidance in evaluating intercultural competence while combining both previous and current knowledge. The following model was derived from the need to understand all aspects of internal and external outcomes affecting IC which caused the four components to remain broad in an attempt to adapt depending on the context of each research.

- *Attitudes:* As Deardorff (2006) refers to them, requisite attitudes, are based on the lower level of the model (see Figure 1) and enhance the upper levels of outcomes. In these attitudes, respect toward other cultures, openness to intercultural learning and tolerance of ambiguity is the core structure of this component. Attitudes are a fundamental level of this model as any form of future intercultural learning will be based on them as one continues to discover by being curious about cultural considerations. This starting point focuses on
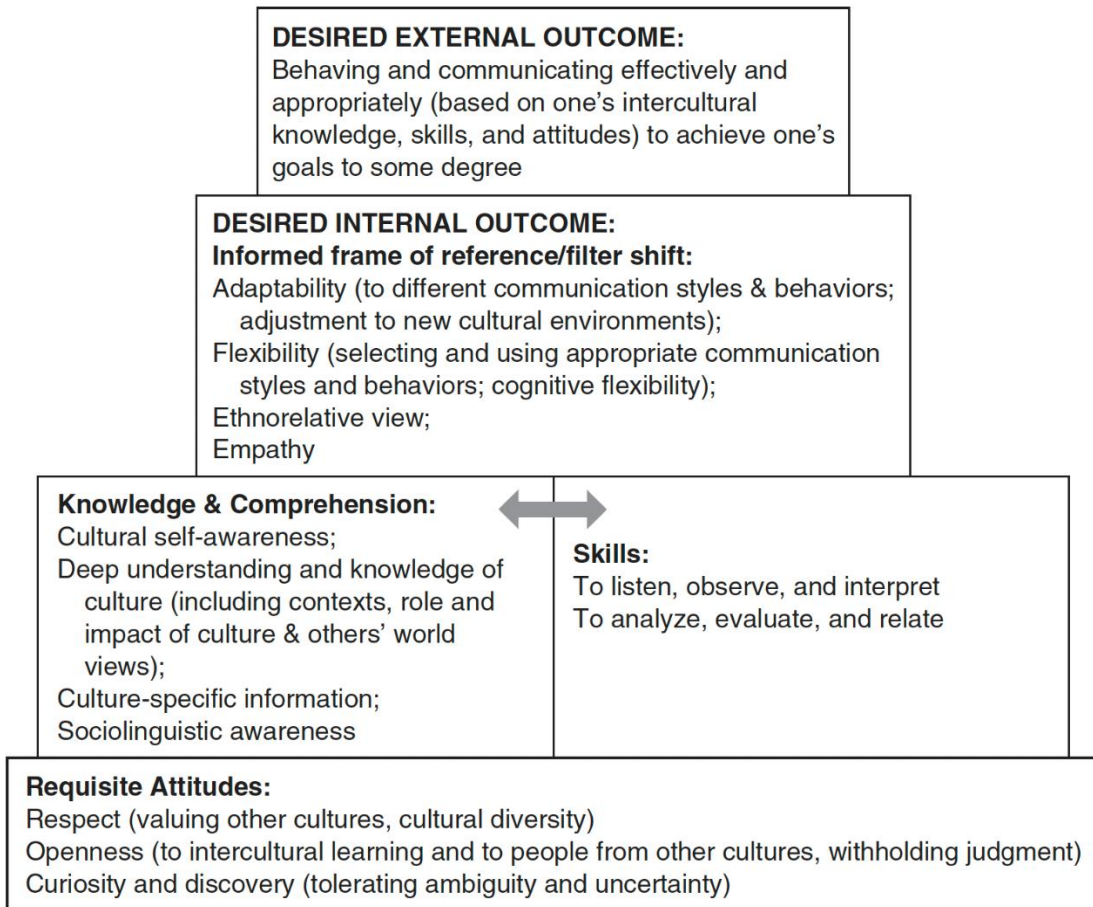
the personal level and individual behaviours that could lead to the development of intercultural competence.

- *Knowledge and Comprehension:* In this component, cultural self-awareness is a critical aspect of advancing one's observational and interpretational skills. Comprehension refers to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding which could impact other team members' roles, beliefs and identities. Skills like analysing and relating to other cultures are treated as part of cultural awareness which eventually affects team interactions and critical thinking.

- *Desired Internal Outcome:* Through internal outcome, Deardorff (2006) refers to a frame of information and the shift made in order to adapt to a culturally diverse environment. It emphasizes the importance of remaining flexible to the changing processes of interactions by choosing appropriate communication styles and adjusting to the stage of internationalization and integration. Lastly, at this point of the model, the learning and developmental levels of competence were already involved and a state of empathy should have potentially been achieved.

- *Desired External Outcome:* The final component of this model is the external outcome of IC. At this stage, behaviours and communication styles have been improved throughout the process of acknowledging and adjusting one's attitudes, skills and comprehension of knowledge. The key objectives of this model should have been achieved at this point and an effective practice of collaboration might have been established. Each individual's goals and achievements might differ since the process of acquiring IC is described as quite complex and limited (Deardorff, 2006).

Through this model, the first of the research questions will be investigated:

How do members of multicultural teams experience communication and collaboration in the given workplace? Are there challenges and opportunities related to cultural differences as described from their perspectives?

This model will aid the research by evaluating each stage separately and aiming to combine them with the experiences of the participants. The effect of each stage on intercultural competence and team interactions will be explored while assessing if the desired internal and external outcomes exist in the case company's work environment.

DESIRED EXTERNAL OUTCOME:
Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree

DESIRED INTERNAL OUTCOME:
Informed frame of reference/filter shift:
Adaptability (to different communication styles & behaviors; adjustment to new cultural environments);
Flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviors; cognitive flexibility);
Ethnorelative view;
Empathy

Knowledge & Comprehension:
Cultural self-awareness;
Deep understanding and knowledge of culture (including contexts, role and impact of culture & others' world views);
Culture-specific information;
Sociolinguistic awareness

Skills:
To listen, observe, and interpret
To analyze, evaluate, and relate

Requisite Attitudes:
Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity)
Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment)
Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty)

- Move from personal level (attitude) to interpersonal/interactive level (outcomes)
- Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of underlying elements

Figure 1. Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence by Deardorff (2004 as shown in Deardorff, 2006: Fig. 3)

3.1.2 Intercultural Competence Model by Matveev & Milter

To expand and grasp the concept of multicultural teams' dynamics and communication, a theoretical framework will be followed as a guide to investigate competencies and differences in the participants' answers. The Intercultural Competence (IC) framework of Matveev & Milter (2004), touches upon the multicultural team and its performance in the scope of three components which will be presented below.

▪ *Cultural knowledge*: This component focuses on each team member's culture which usually carries unique practices, norms and systems of values. Through this part, for this case study, team members and managers will be able to share information regarding differences or difficulties in interactions and communication styles while also sharing if

their working environment is considered flexible and comfortable from their view. As part of cultural knowledge, aspects such as cultural identity, oppression in the workplace and elements involved in cultural differences and group communication will be examined.

- *Skills*: This component focuses on behaviours and attitudes that show competence in regard to other team members' cultures. This usually consists of skills like efficient collaboration among several cultural backgrounds, the ability to efficiently communicate personal patterns and the acceptance of choices and work routines from other co-workers (Matveev & Milter, 2004). The skills to engage in multiple perspectives and identify similarities and differences among cultural contexts will also be considered as part of this component. Last but not least, skills such as problem-solving, technical competence, understanding performance goals, enduring accountability, coordination and control will also be taken into account.

- *Personality orientation*: This component focuses on the intention of team members to relate and show interest in multicultural collaboration as well as their reactions towards foreign employees. The degree of empathy shown for other cultural backgrounds and physical signs such as body language are also considered to be indicators of the understanding of cultural differences and how these are communicated in a team. Lastly, in this component, concepts such as the value of knowledge, understanding and appreciation co-exist and might affect one's assumptions, interactions and definitions of equality (Matveev & Milter, 2004).

Through this model, the second of the research questions will be investigated:

How have cultural knowledge and personal skills influenced the team members' interaction styles and behaviours in the experience of working with a culturally diverse group?

The answers to this question will be analyzed following the three components mentioned above while trying to comprehend if cultural knowledge, skills and personality orientation affect multicultural communication/collaboration and if it is indeed affected, then in what ways. This case study will also evaluate whether effective multicultural communication/collaboration has contributed to the development of intercultural competence within the workplace.
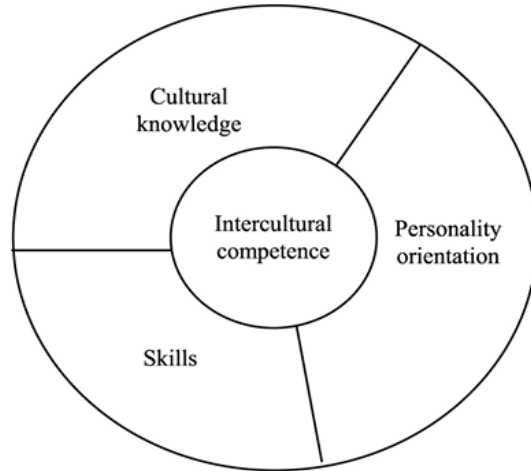
Figure 2. Intercultural Competence Model (IC Model) by Matveev & Milter (2004: Fig. 1)

3.2 Selection and Contribution of Theory

While reviewing both of the chosen theoretical models, one might notice their similar approaches and explanations in regard to Deardorff's (2006) and Matveev & Milter's (2004) components. One common aspect of these models is how the researchers acknowledge and describe the contribution of skills and knowledge. However, according to Deardorff's model, these attitudes reflect the internal and external outcomes of an organization while leading to the acquisition of intercultural competence. This approach illustrates the impact of individual views and the effect of world views on effective communication while aiming to assess one's behaviours and understandings at a group and organizational level.

On the other hand, Matveev & Milter focus on analyzing how personality orientation might involve these cultural skills and knowledge in the process of integration and collaboration by allowing the participants to freely refer to cultural identities and patterns. Additionally, their model considers the linkage between one of this study's research questions and the aim of exploring the groups' interaction styles and experiences. Each model summarizes the aspects of being involved in a multicultural group and seemed relevant to connect every research question with a compatible framework in order to enhance the analysis of this case study's results.

4 Method

In this section, the methodology of the research is presented by considering the research design, description of the case company, data collection & analysis methods, reliability and validity concepts as well as ethical considerations and limitations arising during the study.

4.1 Research Design

This case study gained knowledge about the social, cultural, and professional dimensions of working lives while focusing on experiences, behaviours and social interactions. In this direction, the qualitative research method was used to better understand the participants' standpoints and patterns of communication within their teamwork, by building the chosen theory through the discovery of qualitative data (Fossey, Harvey, Mcdermott & Davidson, 2002). To identify relationships and receive a more detailed description of everyday working life, semi-structured interviews were conducted, consisting of open-ended questions (Flick, 2013). These questions were gathered into interview guides which will assist the process while allowing the participants to share their own approach to the study and offer a more in-depth conversation. Interview guides with slightly different questions were created for non-Swedish team members, Swedish team members, non-Swedish managers and Swedish managers (see Appendix A, B, C, D). These different interview guides were constructed in order to better understand the experiences of the interviewees in relation to their previous working experience, cultural background and country of origin. In such research, the aim was shaped when more information and knowledge were obtained (Devers & Frankel, 2000) while connecting the data with the key interest of this case study.

4.2 The Case Company

The case company is a software corporation with about 520 employees worldwide of whom 499 employees are based in the headquarters in Sweden and 21 are based outside of Sweden. They are dedicated to an industry of automation that offers security and assistance while engaging in partnerships with other companies as well. Their culture builds upon commitment, exploration and inclusion where individual differences are embraced and utilized towards innovation. This was one of the main reasons for collaborating with this company, as their devotion in relation to development and change through the usage of individual characteristics and diversity has been the connecting element between their business's ambitions and this study's purpose.

The case company was founded a few years ago which leads them to a position where they are still growing and expanding the journey from identifying the best working practices as well as promoting an inclusive working environment depending on acceptance and open communication among employees. The multicultural aspect of the company's operations was taken into account since 65% of the employees stated that they were Swedish-born and 35% of them were foreign-born. The exact percentages of these proportions may vary as the company operates in another country besides Sweden and the results are based on an internal survey that was shared in 2022 with the response rate being close to 70%.

The team members who agreed to participate in this case study work closely with each other almost on a daily basis from an office setting while a few days of the week they have the opportunity to work remotely.

Finally, the company's aim to better understand the multicultural aspect of collaboration among their culturally diverse teams and the goal of this study to explore the communication and interaction styles present in their daily working lives has constituted the common ground on which this association was founded.

4.3 Data Collection

For this research study, the primary data were gathered through 13 semi-structured interviews with 12 of the participants being team members and managers from 2 different diverse working teams within the same software company, and 1 HR informant. The open-ended, semi-structured interviews were selected as more appropriate since the participants were team members and managers, framing them as knowledgeable representatives of multicultural collaboration within the company, able to share adequate information about their day-to-day operations. The HR informant was the main contact between the researcher and the company's policies and strategies. Fossey et al. (2002) refer to two of the most important considerations appearing in qualitative research when it comes to data collection and sampling strategies which should be guided through "*appropriateness and adequacy*" (p. 726).

After the pilot interview has been arranged with the HR representative from the company in charge of this thesis project, and the final confirmation has been received, the selection process of the participants began. A purposive sampling strategy was followed since the researcher had informed

the case company about the requirements of the interviewees in an effort to maximize the usefulness of the sample and ensure that the participants will aid with the intention of this study (Fossey et al., 2002). The requirements referred to the following: the capability of participants to conduct the interview in English, to be part of a multicultural team, to be part of a team where at least 3 different countries of origin were present, and to actively cooperate with one another as members of the same team. This research was seeking to implement a purposive strategy to enhance the understanding of the individual and the group angle of multicultural collaboration as well as experiences around culturally diverse environments. This goal could potentially be achieved by selecting a sample of interviewees who would be capable of providing rich information and greater insights in accordance with the research questions (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

All of the interviews were held in English, which was also a requirement shared with the HR representative beforehand, and their duration was approximately 45 minutes. Only a few of the interviews were held online while most of them were held in the headquarters of the company depending on the availability of the participants. In order to assure that the participants have an equal level of familiarity with the concept of this study, terms such as culture, cultural background, cross-cultural training, cultural awareness and cultural competence were defined before the interview process started. Furthermore, before conducting the interviews, the participants were asked to review and sign a consent form where their anonymity would be assured. Afterwards, all of the interviews were fully anonymized and recorded for future transcription and the purpose of this was to analyse the material by going back to each conversation. During the interviews, the participants were able to answer questions regarding their background and country of origin, their previous working experience and multicultural experience, as well as their daily communication, collaboration and adaptation practices. Moreover, questions concerning the company's contribution and support along with their reflections on the topic were also taken into account. The description of each respondent's background and information is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

Description of the Interviewees

Respondents' code (will not be used in the text for privacy purposes)	Role in the company	Country of origin / Nationality	Number of years working in present company	Number of years lived in Sweden	Previous working experience within Sweden / Other countries
TM1	Software Developer	Poland	4	10	Within Sweden and Poland
TM2	Software Developer	France	3	3	Within Sweden, France and England
TM3	Software Developer	Spain	3	9	Within Sweden and Spain
TM4	Software Developer	Italy	3	5	Within Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark
TM5	Software Developer	Italy	4	9	Within Sweden and Italy
TM6	Software Developer	Sweden	1	Life	Within Sweden and Turkey
TM7	Software Developer	Sweden	7	Life	Within Sweden
TM8	Software Developer	Sweden	5	Life	Within Sweden
TM9	Software Developer	Sweden	7	Life	Within Sweden
EM1	Engineering Manager	Hungary	3	Life	Within Sweden
EM2	Engineering Manager	Greece	6	10	Within Sweden and Greece
EM3	Engineering Manager	Bulgaria	3	5	Within Sweden, Germany, China and the UK
HR1	People & Culture Partner	Sweden	1	Life	Within Sweden

Note. Team Members = TM, Engineering Managers = EM, Human Resources Informant = HR

4.4   Data Analysis

Although interview transcripts and notes have offered descriptive information regarding this study, they did not offer explanations and interpretations. For this reason, the data analysis process began

right after the first data had been collected. An inductive approach has been used to analyze the data and more specifically the method of thematic content analysis after the interviews have been transcribed verbatim. This approach was used to frame the research's questions and allow the data to determine emerging themes and derive findings without any prior expectations (Thomas, 2006).

Thematic analysis is able to report the realities of the participants, explore the ways these realities affect their operations and at last, connect these findings with the assumptions made through the chosen theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While reflecting on the purpose of this study, it was noticed that this method would allow the analysis of the transcribed interviews, the identification of themes and categories in those transcripts and finally the presentation of a number of those repeating themes. By repeating this process throughout the analysis stage, more themes and categories emerged by referring to the theoretical frameworks presented above and the analytical ideas evolving in all respects of the research (Gill, Burnard, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).

An overview of the steps followed during this thematic content analysis will be presented below by consulting the guide of Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017).

Beginning of the analysis

Verbatim transcription involved word-to-word replication of recorded conversations (Poland, 1995 as cited in Halcomb & Davidson, 2006) by including pauses, a few non-verbal gestures that would be important for this study and external noises that might have affected the flow of each discussion. After transcribing the interviews, the texts have been read thoroughly many times to fully understand the perception of each participant and start generating ideas of codes that could fit the experiences of the interviewees (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Dividing the text into meaning units

At this stage, the texts were divided into smaller parts according to the interviewees' statements and the initial meaning units were formulated (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). The meaning within each unit was identified and shortened to be able to express the key thoughts presented in each answer.

Initial Open Coding

At this stage, the first codes were created to be used as labels for the meaning units created during the previous step. These codes were reflections of this research regarding the essence of each meaning unit and assisted in the establishment of connections among the units (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). By keeping notes during the initial coding process, this research ensured that the interpretation of the texts would be re-evaluated from start to finish of the analysis process.

Categories and Themes

The next stage involves the development of categories in which several, similar initial codes would be assigned to determine patterns and finally, the ending phase of content analysis which are themes. The focus was to pay equal attention to easily emerging themes and to more demanding patterns that required extra time to be identified (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). At the same time, questions about the origin of each answer were reviewed and sorted depending on the words used in each case.

Final focused coding – Presentation of results

At this stage of final coding, themes emerged and were chosen accordingly to assure the anonymity of the participants and avoid biased decisions (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Quotations were used in the next chapters of this paper to provide a clear representation of the participants' viewpoints and support the trustworthiness of the study.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

The extent to which qualitative research can collect, analyse, interpret and adequately present its findings, is controlled by the trustworthiness of the process and the transparency of the researcher (Fossey et al., 2002).

To support the reliability of the findings in this study, the research method that was chosen aimed to follow consistency within the analytical process and clarity when trying to connect theory with the integrity of the empirical findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). To fully understand the term reliability, the relation between the quality of this research and the purpose of its questions should be examined whilst connecting it with the development of an extensive understanding of a specific phenomenon (Fossey et al., 2002; Stenbacka, 2001, as cited in Golafshani, 2003). At last, this thesis recognized the multiple possible explanations of the gathered material and aimed to outline the participants' experiences by remaining unbiased and neutral (Noble & Smith, 2015) by

preparing the interview guides beforehand and asking the same questions in each group, by including rich descriptions of the discussion during the interview process and finally, by pursuing an exploratory character to ensure that all of the different perspectives would be represented.

Practices pertaining to the validity of this study were also followed such as the quality of the chosen sample which was willing to share personal experiences focused on the study's aim and the formulation of the research purpose and questions depicting the future analysis and correlation with the collection of primary data (Golafshani, 2003). The concept of validity has been described as the intention of each research methodology to explore subjectivity and rigour in every interaction taking part during the research (Dodd, 2002 as cited in Golafshani, 2003). The goal of conducting individual interviews in this study was to allow the voices and perceptions of each participant to be expressed in an open manner. Hence, the concepts of the adopted reliability and validity are essential to classify the carefulness and objectivity of the material, although the generalization of the results depends on the representativeness of the sample (Fossey et al., 2002). This representativeness was endorsed by following a purposive sampling method in order to include participants with relevant previous cultural experience but at the same time with diverse working routines and perceptions. Patton (2001, as cited in Golafshani, 2003), stated that reliability can be considered as a consequence of validity and thus these two terms are interrelated in every study.

Even though the abovementioned strategies were followed, an entirely subjective qualitative study is always hard to be maintained as a variety of approaches is included and the focus is on behaviours, values and judgments (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). Nonetheless, the design, material and findings were inspected continuously to strengthen the outcomes of the study and reinforce the flexibility on the part of the researcher.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles are of high importance in every research study and especially in qualitative research since the detailed nature of the process develops into a more fragile practice when individual, personal discussions are included (Arifin, 2018; Ponterotto, 2010). Particular attention was given to informed consent and voluntary participation since the participants were sent, via email, a form to be signed beforehand and were able to withdraw at any given moment throughout

the process to minimize harm or inconvenience (Fossey et al., 2002). Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved during the data collection and analysis procedures by using code names and without revealing any details from the participants' working environment or team as was agreed with the HR representative of the case company in advance. The interviews were conducted in a way that suited the participants' schedules and respected their availability and choice of the interviewing place. Lastly, respect towards the participants' decisions and answers guided the entire research process and ethical responsibility (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001) has been identified by the researcher as essential before proceeding with this study. In all cases, given the personal and prolonged interaction with the participants, new directions for research were unveiled (Ponterotto, 2010) and ethical considerations were adjusted accordingly throughout the process.

4.7 Limitations

The first limitation when starting this study was caused due to a delayed confirmation of access and collaboration with the case company. As a result, the interview process started later than expected whilst the researcher was awaiting the participants' acceptance and information of availability. During this interim, a part of the teams that were initially the focus of the researcher became unavailable due to other projects taking place in the case company. Another limitation originated from the small sample of participants (13) which resulted from the time allotment during the master thesis according to the agenda, the eagerness of the employees to volunteer for this study, and finally, the careful and time-consuming analysis of the gathered material. Moreover, this study's sample included only European participants. However, the interviewees were able to successfully contribute to the purpose of this study and aid with the research questions about their working relations and interactions.

To conclude, for future research, the sample could be broader in an attempt to be connected with a wider context or group, achieve a greater generalization of results (Mohajan, 2018) and follow standardized reliability and validity concepts.

5 Results and Empirical Findings

In this section, a summary of the empirical findings and results gathered from the individual interviews will be presented. These findings are based on the personal experiences, perceptions and observations of the participants which will be connected with the theoretical models and research questions that were presented in the previous chapters. Direct quotations will also be used but each respondent's code will not be shown for anonymity and confidentiality purposes. Therefore, the only descriptive detail that will be used is their position in the case company.

In sections 5.1 and 5.2 the presentation of the participants' answers was focused on the following research question:

How do members of multicultural teams experience communication and collaboration in the given workplace? Are there challenges and opportunities related to cultural differences as described from their perspectives?

While in section 5.3 the findings were focused on the second research question:

How have cultural knowledge and personal skills influenced the team members' interaction styles and behaviours in the experience of working with a culturally diverse group?

In section 5.1 the subsections of corporate language in the workplace, personality attitudes in cultural contexts, and miscommunication & conflict potential will be analyzed according to the participants' answers.

5.1 Challenges in Communication and Collaboration

5.1.1 Corporate Language in a Multilingual Workplace

Previous research in culturally diverse groups and multinational companies has elaborated on the benefits of language management and learning by focusing mainly on multilingualism in the workplace as well as on the imperative need for a single language of communication which is usually English (Tange & Lauring, 2009). During Tange & Lauring's (2009) project, language has been identified as a concern regarding internal and external communication for information flow and seemed applicable to the workgroup setting investigated in this thesis project. During the interviews, it was mentioned that multicultural settings generate and produce multifactoral working duties and as a result, individuals coming from diverse countries of origin where the native

language is not always English, have to learn how to adapt. The participants mentioned quite a few relevant points to this aspect in their daily work and socialization processes while most of them demonstrated how language competence has not been a barrier to their interactions but rather a learning and uniting procedure.

All of the team members indicated that English is the main working and speaking language in the workplace during meetings, lunch breaks and after-work initiatives. A different answer was given when they were referring to employees fluent in Swedish or with their native language being Swedish. In those cases, the composition of the workgroup would affect the speaking language as in some instances, when all of the employees were able and willing to communicate in Swedish, the working language would switch from English to Swedish very fast. One of the team members with a Swedish background mentioned the following:

> Well, a majority of non-Swedish people are here. It's very natural to speak English as a common language, it's like you fall into English. There is a difference when we come into situations where there has been a minority of non-Swedish people, it was very easy for the group to kind of converge to Swedish unintentionally…And this is when you talk about the meetings and work, but then in natural communication is about switching to English. It's easy to be without including English sometimes. Though, like with a lot of people I work with, it's always kind of mixed that people working here also want to learn Swedish, so they want to be a bit challenged. Sometimes, they want you to basically speak Swedish because they want to learn also. That is the challenging part, to not be disrespectful in the way that you kind of move to another language and include everybody. I think that would be the largest challenge if we would have one or two English-speaking persons with five Swedish-speaking persons. But now when we are kind of like the majority, we need to speak English very naturally and then we do it.

On the other hand, a few respondents conceived language skills as an individual competence that depends on a personal ability to engage in certain topics of conversation and continuously evolve around them. However, the variation among those competencies has not been described as a major issue of collaboration or as a difficulty. Two main factors affecting this competence were, as described, the age of the respondents since most of the team members were relatively young and the previous international experience of the respondents for study or work purposes, which has been mentioned by most of them. One of the managers with a foreign background after answering a question about language barriers and daily interactions mentioned:

I've not been in a position where I have not been able to collaborate, but it has sometimes been more difficult. Then of course there is the language barrier depending on how proficient you are in the language. But I would say that's more individual competence rather than culture. Moreover, the teams here have created their own initiatives having to speak Swedish and other things like that.

The case company's corporate language is English and this has been communicated to all of the employees in an attempt to form an inclusive nature of cooperation which could create awareness linked to the social power of the organisation. One of the team members mentioned the importance of this practice and highlighted the value it has for a newcomer in Sweden when trying to adapt and explore future job opportunities. Several of the team members reflected upon this practice from a business perspective focusing on information flow and stated that it appears to be slower once in a while, but at the same time, they would still appreciate each interaction for the knowledge they gained afterwards. One of the team members with a foreign background focused on the following aspect:

If I would be like in my home country, it would be communication without problems, but at the same time you would not get all of these interactions, and I think, they are also important as it builds some sort of respect for one another. I actually like to spend time explaining something to somebody and someone else does that for me and it just works that way. But yeah, they say mistakes happen. I think they will happen and we should just accommodate them.

One of the challenges in communication mentioned during the interviews was referring to individual preconceptions and personal understanding of events. A couple of the team members and managers described how language and ways of expressing one's thoughts are different which can easily lead to misunderstandings. The interpretation of one's opinion could generate positive and negative feedback from other team members because of their divergent perceptions. As the following quotes illustrate, the key to those interactions was to be as clear as possible and cooperate without following personal assumptions of one's behaviour.

We also discussed how this sense we have for language is different, so something that for me and my other co-workers was totally fine, for another co-worker, was perceived as very harsh, for example. And it was very difficult for us to understand because for us it was totally normal and we were just used to interacting that way.

I always say that we also come from different backgrounds and it's not the language, in this case, the barrier. I mean that mindset to express yourself in a better way because you know what we have in the

back of our mind is not what the other person has in the back of their mind. So it's more about trying to be as clear as possible and not taking everything for granted.

Additionally, the interviewees mentioned a few events where they had to repeat themselves twice for a situation to be heard or for a project to be completed on time, but those were not connected with or affected by the language barrier in any way.

5.1.2 *Personality Attitudes in Cultural Contexts*

While examining the participants' answers, it has been generally recognized as a challenge to separate personality traits from cultural and contextual differences. In a previous study by Cheung, Van de Vijver & Leong (2011), two ways of comparing personality with culture have been mentioned. The first one was by following and exploring the universality of Western personality models in an attempt to analyse the level of cross-cultural variance in personality and structure. The second way was to analyse in-depth personalities in certain cultural contexts by noticing the effects that were developed by this theoretical model. In this study, the empirical findings will be explored by broader theoretical lenses aiming to cover the wide spectrum of personality shapes within the cultural backgrounds revealed throughout the research.

A leading challenge for the majority of interviewees was to clearly identify when behaviours were caused due to one's cultural background or due to personality traits and characteristics. Most of the participants mentioned that it might take time to differentiate and decode human behaviours especially when you are a part of such an international and diverse workplace. The managers emphasized the importance of not concentrating on nationalities or cultures but understanding how an employee operates as an individual within a work team. The quotes mentioned below express their views from their working experience within the case company so far:

That's the challenging part as well, that this might take time. When you enter a team that consists of people from different countries then it takes time to understand, you know, what are the ground rules, what should we all follow here to make sure that everyone is actually having fun. I'm not really sure if it's about cultural diversity, but it's also a matter of different preferences. So people would like to, for example, run the meetings in different ways of course, but then, for example, after COVID-19, everyone can be in the office or working from home. And so I would say it's a matter of preference.

For me, it's not important because I always focus on diversity, so you can be diverse in personality or gender, not just country. I would say it's more on what experience you have from working before and

also of course your personality to match that to the teams. I would not say that's because of the cultural differences but I would say that's more because of personal traits.

The participants answered questions about the existence of disrespectful behaviours or events in their workplace and most of them had not noticed relevant incidents. A few of them mentioned hearing about behaviours or being present at discussions that seemed disrespectful from their perspective but concluded that they did not react since the employees taking part in the conversation did not seem to be bothered or offended at that time. Some comments from participants with a foreign background regarding those questions are quoted below:

That's a very interesting question because for some cultures, something can be disrespectful and for other cultures is not disrespectful. I mean, sometimes, I didn't feel that I need to report anything to someone, but it's more like, guys, let's sit down and make sure that everyone is happy. Basically, if something strange happens then we tend to address it.

I mean, in general, I didn't have problems with anybody and when I had a difficult experience, it seemed to be the same for everyone around me. So, I'm not completely sure if it's a cultural thing. It might be more, you know, a personal way of interacting but I feel like sometimes you really need to move. First of all, you have to be aware of the problem, so we need to like to look from a totally different perspective and that doesn't come naturally. Someone has to make them aware. And I never felt like my nationality was a problem in any work environment here, I would say that the problems one faces at work, are multifactorial.

Several interviewees stated that they had to adapt to people and to the environment around them even if they were part of a homogeneous team when it comes to countries of origin, or of a diverse team as they currently are. Due to their previous working experience and their previous international experience which was the case for most of the participants, they mentioned that generalization is not a process they wish to follow or incorporate into their daily working life. The quotations below are both from team members with Swedish and foreign backgrounds and highlight how this was reported from their perspectives:

You would see still different approaches even if it was a total Swedish group and we would be able to find these kinds of differences. This idea of how people behave in different countries, and to a certain degree it's probably true, it's not something that you can use to generalize individuals. These are stereotypical opinions. It's dangerous, but if you are aware of it, you can at least catch it when, and if, it happens. Since it's easy to be blind in your environment. So yes, I hope I would like to give these the bias needed.

I think it comes with the personality. I see people that it takes forever for them to adapt. They always argue about the Swedish routine of people in general, when they have their lives, they have an agenda for everything. But I had relations with both international and Swedish and we had after-works or activities together. So I didn't have an issue. On the other hand, I know people who have totally opposite experiences in their workplaces.

You adapt to people. We have different perspectives but I don't know if it's because we are different people or because we're from different places. Since people have different, like preconceptions culturally and it's, I guess it's easy to have misunderstandings, maybe. But yeah, I guess it also depends on the teams and the people

Lastly, the different cultural backgrounds within each team have been reported as a positive addition to the work setting and the daily interactions while also mentioning that different university education depending on the country of origin and different ways of working motivated the discussions among employees. However, misunderstandings were still present in those discussions since, according to the participants, each individual had a personal way of absorbing and expressing knowledge.

5.1.3 *Miscommunication and Conflict Potential*

Oetzel, Dhar & Kirschbaum (2007) referred to intercultural conflicts and focused on theorizing and modelling potential explanations of conflict behaviours. Disintegration in workgroup teams appeared to contribute to struggles in cooperation while cultural diversity in organizations seemed to influence whether employees' personalities and cultural values would eventually affect their attitudes. In this section, a short reference to the challenges each team member experienced in relation to communication difficulties will be presented, as part of them mentioned the existence of conflicts and outlined the behaviours formulated after those appeared.

It was suggested by some interviewees that individuals tend to react differently to conflicts which could cause even more collaboration difficulties in the long term if those were not resolved on time. One of the managers with a foreign background mentioned:

Some people are less expressive and some people are more expressive, but by running discussions in the team, then the team sees the value of this discussion slowly and then they start engaging more. So usually people are very focused on their work and they want you to see their deadlines and their deliveries. They pay less attention sometimes to these difficult discussions they have to do about team dynamics and how everyone can feel happy in the team. I see some behaviours, for example, where certain people tend to avoid conflicts. And certain people, I am not saying that they tend to create

conflicts, but they feel that in order to come to a conclusion, then there must be a small conflict. I see sometimes that different people from different backgrounds apply different ways to reach conclusions.

Most of the respondents concluded that time is key when they were referring to conflict and communication difficulties. The more time the team members spent together the easier it got to interact, cooperate and achieve common goals related to a work project or informal discussions. One of the team members with a Swedish background who has worked in more than one team in the same company stated that:

> I think it has been more about the different teams that have been a part of and the different personalities in the team of what works and what doesn't work. For example, in some teams, we have been very much aligned and there was no conflict while in other teams it has been a little bit more conflict. Now we have learned to accept that and make it a strength for us, I think. But I think this has more to do with the personalities in the team rather than that we have learned to use new ways of communicating. In the beginning, we also got help from the manager to resolve the conflicts, but we have now learned to deal with them in a good way. I think it had to do with personalities, some are keener on conflicts and others are not.

As a summary of the findings concerning these struggles in effectively expressing one's opinion, it has been stated that in the end, each team member learned to be open with one another and realized that the case company is an open space for expressing both concerns and appreciation. The managers acknowledged the usefulness of being accepting and devoting time to gaining a deeper understanding of the situation to be able to offer solutions and connect conflicts with the appropriate method of resolution. The team members concentrated on the value of adapting to a new working environment and adjusting to new forms of communication.

5.2 Opportunities in Communication and Collaboration

In section 5.2 the subsections of acculturation in the Swedish workplace, cultural knowledge exchange, and the positive role of company support will be analyzed according to the participants' answers.

5.2.1 Acculturation in the Swedish Organizational Structure

The complex phenomenon of culture has received recognition over the years from several researchers (Fang, 2012; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2005) and major contributions have been made in relation to management knowledge, cultural change and multilayered working relations. During these interviews, participants had the chance to express their views in relation to the

Swedish working culture and their reflections on the environment. A few of them were able to compare this working and living culture with their previous working experience in other countries which led to analysing their similarities and differences. This is evident in the quotes mentioned below:

> Yeah, I think I am adapted to the Swedish environment because like it's hard to not adapt to something that is actually better for you than it used to be somewhere else. I think I adapted in that way maybe cause we also have some personal traits or let's say background, that is coming from my previous environment in my home country which may be useful here where the way you work is much less stressful than before. It will be important, for example, because there, in my home country, you get a lot of pressure put on you from them.

> But I feel the culture is more relaxed in Sweden in some way. And uh, they pay more attention to each other, to the people. They are trying to understand each other and I think they care more about the employee than in my country, in general. Also, it's changing and I know that my colleagues, like other software developers in my country, are getting the same benefits now.

These quotes illustrate how most of the team members described the working culture as less stressful, more relaxed and more open to expressing one's opinion during meetings or other gatherings. Moreover, a few of the respondents shared their initial reflections when they first started working in a Swedish working environment after moving here from another country. A part of their reflections was the support, encouragement and "good words" they would receive after sharing an idea or proposing a different approach to a project. Several of them reported that this behaviour was appearing too often in some instances where it started losing its true meaning. The following quotation illustrates the experience of one of the team members with a foreign background:

> When I started to work in Sweden it was all the encouraging words that they would say, mostly it was coming from Swedes, and it really surprised me when I arrived and I was trying to contribute to the discussion and propose an idea. They would say 'oh that's a super good idea'. And when you were participating in the conversation and then every time someone said 'oh yeah that's good thanks for your input' things like these, which at first sounded to me like it's fake, but it's part of the culture. If you say it too much though, then it kind of loses its purpose. Maybe it was to make the work environment more friendly? But I kind of felt like this is too much for me.

Participants who were living their entire life in Sweden or did not have previous working experience in their country of origin were not able to share concrete examples of how Swedish

culture was present in their daily working life. Along with the aforementioned comments, the participants stated some other differences they were able to notice compared to their home countries. These were with reference to meeting deadlines on time, leading a sustainable life and appreciating positive feedback more than negative. Moreover, the existence of conflict and argument avoidance was noticed more than once during the interviews with the different team members and managers. A quote is cited here for further clarification:

> On average I think it's a little bit more that way here in Sweden than in my country. I feel like in my country, we tend to look a lot more on the negative side instead, as we give negative feedback. Here we appreciate the things that work in Sweden and in opposition we tend to just look at the bright side and the good things. We tend to avoid the problem, but then it also depends on the actual person, because not all people are the same even here. I mean, I worked with employees who liked the conflicts and they said the things they were thinking and were not scared of giving their opinion and with others who were very shy about that and they weren't direct with confrontation.

To conclude, studying and working in Sweden was mentioned as less formal in regard to employee relations and direct communication with supervisors or managers. Upper management in the case company was described as easy to approach and flat hierarchies were mentioned as an advantage to decision-making and empowerment of employees' voices.

5.2.2 Cultural Knowledge Exchange

According to Hajro, Gibson & Pudelko (2017), the understanding of different world views, values and ways of working contributes to the integration of a diverse working team and defines their sociocultural awareness. This cooperative learning perspective was mentioned throughout the interviews by all of the participants as they endorsed the value of working in a multicultural group.

The opportunity to hear different languages in the workplace, and the exchange of information regarding jokes, expressions or social actions in one's own country, were described as positive contributions to their personal and professional growth. Moreover, the relationships among team members were sometimes built upon this exchange as more discussions were triggered and the multicultural aspect of each working group was welcomed by everyone. As stated in a few interviews this was helpful also when reviewing current political and social changes in the world. When elaborating on group work and team projects, this diversified learning was again mentioned as an asset:

> Personally, while I was living in my home country, I was not aware of a lot of parts of the world, I mean, I knew the rest of the world existed, but my world was very limited. Instead, when you move abroad in general, in the working place, you get in contact with a lot more and I really believe tends to make you a better person because you become more aware of the difficulties of other people because of the difficulties that you experienced in the first place. Also, I feel like the more diverse, the more different points of view you have, it's very good to look at it from different perspectives. Whenever you're developing something is also really connected with different parts of the world, since we were in different schools and we learned different kinds of methods.

Additionally, a certain focus was given by the managers on the different approaches a diverse group of people brings to the company and the variety of perspectives they are adding to current problems and solutions. One of the managers with a foreign background has mentioned the following:

> I mean, we have people who are from different countries and I think they bring in different values. It could be, of course, personal values as well, but also like traditions and I think that's good. It creates a more open atmosphere. People are more tolerant towards differences that way.

During the interviews, it was highlighted that different idiosyncrasies and "temperaments" as stated, were welcomed in the workplace and each employee felt free to add their direct or indirect voice in conversations and collaborations. Furthermore, new ways of spending their leisure time were introduced with after-work activities or personal initiatives which were also characterized as beneficial because of being introduced to different cultures and mindsets. Lastly, when referring to information exchange, the usefulness of diverse academic education or previous working experience was also noticed to be valuable for openness, collaboration and appreciation of differences. Otherwise, as one of the team members with a Swedish background mentioned:

> You tend to be stuck in your own bubble, so I think, with this team, it helps because we all come from different backgrounds and universities.

5.2.3   *The Positive Role of Company Support*

The values and structure of the case company rely primarily on trust, collaboration and innovation. This is something that is stated on the company's website and mentioned a number of times during the interviews as part of the onboarding process. The objective of this interviews' aspect was to collect the employees' views on these values which as was concluded, were positively connected with the company's operations and assistance.

The respondents mentioned that the case company often organizes events, after-work activities or other initiatives aiming to engage employees and connect their different backgrounds by being open and transparent. It was also reported that foreign employees received assistance when aiming to learn the Swedish language or when they wanted to communicate with others within the company who might be more knowledgeable in a field than them. Besides that, the company offered a language café in an attempt to give the possibility to practice their chosen language and expand their current skillset in a friendly and relaxing environment within the workplace.

Moreover, the respondents were asked if they considered the case company as a diverse and inclusive environment which is open to different nationalities and cultures. Most of them experienced difficulties in answering this question as they first agreed but then had to reconsider the definition of culture and diversity. All of the interviewees agreed that the company is open to different nationalities, although this was mainly connected afterwards with countries located in Europe. Thereafter, the interviewees stated that the rest of the globe might not be represented in the company in such a high percentage but without mentioning this aspect as unfavourable to their working routine. However, different types of diversity were discussed and questioned by all of the participants in regard to age, gender and university experience.

Lastly, the initiatives the company chooses to offer to the employees were considered to be constructive and interesting by the interviewees as the following quote indicates:

> I think that it makes you aware at least to recognize that there are many kinds of cultures in the company and it makes you a bit more aware of it and you just see a lot of different nationalities around you.

On the other hand, when mentioning inclusivity and underrepresented employees being a part of the company, most of the respondents said that they had not noticed any incidents or behaviours related to those. However, one of the managers commented:

> I have not experienced that. I have not seen it, but I know that we had a big company survey on inclusion and diversity and it actually showed that we had some groups who felt not that listened to or seen or not appreciated that much. And that was a big surprise for me. I have not noticed that before. I have not seen any colleagues or any teams who have had that.

This survey was shared in 2022 with all of the employees and showed that the majority of them had a strong sense of inclusivity in the case company while there was a proportion who felt that

certain perspectives of diversity and inclusion were lacking in the case company. These perspectives differed among departments and were mainly focused on genders and ethnicities.

5.3 Interaction Styles and Behaviours

5.3.1 Previous Multicultural Experience as a Learning Process

To classify the outcomes of earlier working experience in other countries than Sweden, participants were asked to reflect on how this has influenced their personal and professional experiences and developments. Reid & Garson (2017), mentioned in their study of international students that multicultural teamwork can have an impact on intercultural learning and the formulation of communication styles while reducing the presence of entrenched stereotypes.

8 out of 13 interviewees had previous studying or working experience in other countries and have already been used to communicating in English or being part of a diverse work group. Their earlier experiences were described as very useful and most of them stated that this part of their lives had shaped their future behaviours and understandings in their working career. One of the team members with a foreign background reported the following:

> I'd like to think that I'm more aware of different points of view now because of that multicultural experience. I don't know if it's entirely true I mean, especially in the country I studied, I've met a lot of people from different backgrounds and that's where you realize that everyone has different experiences. Then they share different points of view when you talk about events that are happening in the world, like Brexit or like the war in Ukraine and I feel like I've heard pros and cons coming from different people from different backgrounds that I wouldn't get if I stayed in my own country or region. So in that sense, I think I understand better why people, or how people, could get different points of view. I hope that I'm listening to a bit more different alternatives now than just what I see or hear in the news. It opened your mind.

All respondents pointed out that their previous experiences affected their current working and interaction styles and stated that when disagreements occurred, the level of acceptance and understanding has been significantly changed and enhanced over time by working as part of an international organization.

5.3.2 Adaptability or Flexibility?

After analyzing acculturation in the previous section, a more detailed description of how the interviewees defined adaptability in the new country or the new workplace, will be presented.

Williams (2005) focused on the personality traits of successful intercultural interactions and characterized them as essential, especially when referring to stability and personal strength. Cross-cultural adaptation was a topic of discussion during each interview and the participants' answers varied depending on their previous experiences.

Most of the foreign employees, who were once newcomers to the country and the case company, felt like the transition was easy and that they did not have to adapt in order to cooperate successfully. Others said that they just had to imitate the ways of working here in Sweden by paying attention to their employees' patterns and behaviours. A few of them also mentioned that the most challenging part was adapting to newcomers' personal routines rather than to their patterns of working. Following on this aspect, all of the interviewees reported that when adding new team members to their team, information flow and the efficient way of working, took longer to evolve, as more time was needed for everyone to learn and adapt. One of the respondents described the onboarding experience as follows:

> I think that definitely, I had to adapt a bit. But it's also more personal maybe, not really related to my culture at that time since sometimes I tend to be very direct in what I say and this could be also very direct for my home country as well. As I said before, I think it helped me a lot knowing the background of the people you are working with and looking to adapt a bit to others and not just thinking about yourself and your point of view.

By looking at the other side of the events, a couple of the respondents mentioned that it was more difficult in the beginning when their team was not that diverse, from a nationality perspective, which led them to feel more isolated. After some time, when more team members were added to the team, it was described to be simpler and more natural to socialize and develop relationships. One team member with a foreign background shared their own onboarding experience:

> I used to be just the only one here from a different country in the beginning. So I kind of felt a bit alienated, to be honest, and also, you know, I find it actually pretty common that if you're in a team where you have all Swedes, they're also not very open, not really. You don't really know where to get at first.

One of the managers with a foreign background shared that adaptation was the main factor of the transition process during onboarding and concluded that foreigners tend to adapt to the Swedish way of working and interacting, which sometimes happens unconsciously.

When I moved to this company, you suddenly realize that you do not have only the Swedish culture, but you have so, so many different cultures that you have to adapt to. I think most of the people with international backgrounds adapt to the Swedish culture, though. For example, here I see that many people that can be from, for example, France or Germany or other places that used to have this directness in their communication, they adapt a lot to the Swedish way. So they even start also to be, you know, not so direct anymore. They think twice before saying something.

However, another remark which was noticed many times during the interviews was touching upon being flexible and open to change instead of adaptive. Several respondents referred to their first working experience with the case company as uncomplicated and welcoming which minimized the possibility of feeling alone, excluded, or an outsider.

5.3.3 Management Contribution

The performance of a multicultural team is often connected to their managers' approach and the importance of their guidance and supervision. Successful managers are commonly associated with diverse perspectives, strong technical and people skills as well as valuable working experience and knowledge. Lisak, Erez, Sui & Lee (2016) points out the motives of multicultural leaders and their contribution to the team's goals and performance. This focus was also stated during the interviews by several participants who described the relationship with their direct manager as open but with professional distance.

The managers approached their team members from different aspects and handled their needs depending on their experience and the technical tools provided by the company or by their own initiative. When all of the managers were asked to share one skill that they consider as crucial for their area of expertise, the following answers were received accordingly:

My experience shaped me in being more accepting. So I would say a higher level of acceptance of differences is important, not just for cultures, but for personalities as well. Also, not looking so much at where you come from but more looking into what you contribute to the team and why you think as you do, to gain a deeper understanding of why an individual is acting, behaving like this.

Some people contribute more, and some people contribute a little bit less, but we aim to have people contributing to the best of their abilities. And this is what we discussed in the team as well, and you know, sometimes conflicts happen in the team when people work together, but we always aim to solve them all together, by discussing and identifying them.

I think, onboarding in situations like these is extremely important. Also talking about culture and values, talking about behaviours and talking about what developing a product like ours needs. Of course, it's super much technology, it's software, but it needs also the human aspect and you cannot rely only completely on the technology part. You have to invest also time in thinking about your behaviour, your relationships at work, how you communicate with your colleagues and yeah, make people understand that those soft skills are also important.

The same question was asked to all of the team members and they indicated as essential for their managers to show trust, to have the ability to read people, to be open, respectful and friendly toward diverse backgrounds and mindsets, and last but not least, to be knowledgable about their field of work.

6 Discussion and Analysis

In this section, by following the chosen theoretical frameworks and connecting the findings with previous research, an open discussion will be presented. The analysis of the results presented in chapter 5 will also be mentioned followed by the researcher's reflections.

6.1 Challenges and Opportunities in Communication and Collaboration

The results connected with the first research question will be analysed with the assistance of the intercultural competence model by Deardorff (2006). The interviewees' perspectives will be connected with the layers of her model (see Chapter 3), starting with the requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension skills and concluding with internal and external outcomes related to the case company. The descriptions of the respondents aided this study in gaining a deeper understanding of what they define as opportunities and challenges in their current globalized and innovative workplace by highlighting their realities where personalities are noticed and prioritized over nationalities.

6.1.1 Requisite Attitudes as the Basis of Perceptions

All of the participants emphasized that personal attitudes affected their understanding, behaviours and eventually the monitoring of difficulties and opportunities within their team. This is directly connected with the model and conclusion of Deardorff (2006) who represents the fundamental nature of attitudes as the basis of every competence. Moreover, each respondent highlighted the importance of engaging with other team members by learning more about their individual characteristics and preferences instead of connecting their choices with their cultural backgrounds. The analysis revealed that in the case company, what appeared to be most important is first the adjustment of each team member but also retaining one's cultural values and norms at the same time.

Additionally, it was found, as Deardorff (2006) supports, that the skills and learning which might be gained throughout the lifetime of an individual, will not overlook the foundation of her model which is intimate attributes of one's perception and judgement. The respondents clearly supported her reasoning by answering that attitudes such as tolerance, respect, openness and curiosity are essentially linked with their personalities and predilections. This exhibits that employees in the

case company communicate and collaborate under their interpersonal level of competence which, at some times, might be affected by external elements or cultural values.

Finally, a general conclusion, related to Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence (see Chapter 3), is that her component of requisite attitudes offers space to change, improvement and the addition of other elements influencing the general assessment of competence. One could argue that if there was a shift in the frame of reference for the interview questions, the participants would not mention nationality or other cultural identifications as a factor affecting, in any way, their daily routines and cooperation. Furthermore, as explained by the respondents, although their approaches varied significantly in how they interpreted most of the questions, all of them admitted that intercultural competence and cultural differences are not topics that they have thought about in the past since they have not been actively involved in their field of work.

6.1.2   Knowledge & Comprehension Skills as the Next Layer of Perceptions

The research made known that most of the participants connected personality attitudes from section 6.1.1 as part of the knowledge and comprehension skills that were present in their workplace. Deardorff (2006) refers to the deep understanding and knowledge of culture as part of this component which usually includes personal roles and concepts in the company as well as colleagues' world views. These world views were once again described, both by the team members and by the managers, as a dimension of one's personality connecting it with the ability to listen, observe, accept and interpret. However, in relation to most of the participants' answers, these knowledge skills and the frame of cultural awareness, have been importantly affected by the company's efforts to offer pieces of training, lessons and assistance when necessary. In this part of her analysis, Deardorff (2006), also mentions specific sociolinguistic skills and culture-focused information. The diverse context within which the company chooses to exist and evolve is a great link with Deardorff's logic. When discussing this aspect of diversity and inclusion with the interviewees, it became evident that the case company was constantly organizing events and social gatherings in which everyone was able to take part, connect and learn from one another. With this approach, the skills of analysing, observing and evaluating were highly enhanced and became a topic of discussion among the employees, even among those who have never thought about the topic of this thesis or the topic of the company's events before.

Lastly, by following Deardorff's (2006) reasoning, the necessary skills that were needed for an individual to acquire intercultural communication competence are key in framing learning and development as a part of the employees' working life by embracing both personal attitudes and skills and also by providing knowledge. Cultural awareness is a difficult term to be assessed but as mentioned in most of the interviews:

> If this is something that refers to nationality and different cultures, then yes the company takes many initiatives and at least makes you aware of it.

6.1.3 Desired Internal & External Outcomes in the Case Company

The results implied that the themes which emerged during the interviews were mostly related to language barriers, personality characteristics, miscommunications, cultural knowledge exchange and company support. Another theme under consideration was the outcomes of adaptability and flexibility as was also presented in Deardorff's (2006) pyramid model of competence (see Chapter 3). The adjustment process to all of the themes mentioned above has been illustrated as simple and gradual by the participants which also pointed out the internal procedures that are followed by the company and upper management. When Deardorff (2006) refers to internal and external outcomes, she focuses on communication styles that are accepted and considered appropriate by the working group and by the company as well as effective management behaviours and individual informed frames of communication.

On the contrary, only a few incidents of miscommunication and conflicts were mentioned during the interviews as part of the challenges a team might face and, once again, were not linked to the cultural backgrounds of the parties involved. In fact, in one of the interviews it was mentioned that:

> It might be a personal way of interacting, I am pretty sure that it is not a cultural thing. I feel it's because, in our job, we tend to have more conflicts because we do a lot of research and development so then you need to have discussions. You need to take decisions on technical aspects and we don't always have the same opinions. Sometimes the environment can be perceived as competitive, so overall I feel like people tend to argue a little bit more.

However, even when these cases were voiced, the respondents claimed that the environment remained flexible and that the valued objectives were achieved which has also been a part of Deardorff's (2006) external outcomes. It is worth mentioning that most of the interviewees have

their individual tasks and responsibilities on a daily basis but are part of broader common team projects and monthly goals. In cases where direct and regular collaboration was needed throughout some projects, the team members mentioned more incidents of friction.

To conclude, all of the outcomes that were depicted as a summary of the interviewees' interpretations, were not solely associated with one of the components in Deardorff's (2006) model but were the result of a combination among those together with other behavioural, structural or contextual issues that might have not been enclosed by the participants.

6.2   Interaction Styles and Behaviours

The results connected with the second research question will be analyzed with the assistance of the intercultural competence model by Matveev & Milter (2004). The layers of their model (see Chapter 3) will be used in an attempt to further investigate how behaviours and communication styles have evolved among the participants, according to their own viewpoints. These will be compared with the participants' personality orientation, skills and cultural knowledge. A flexible method of interaction appeared among all of the interviewees as personal characteristics were again present and were affected by the individual skills each member had developed and retained over the years.

6.2.1   *Personality Orientation toward Intercultural Interaction*

Interaction styles and behaviours differ significantly among individuals and their way of conducting work can often be affected by their personal system of values, beliefs and mentalities. Matveev & Milter (2004) referred to personality orientation as the individual interest of an employee to engage with foreigners or with other cultural backgrounds. This research showed that most of the interviewees were either used to intercultural interactions due to previous experiences or were willing to engage and learn more about international communication. Their reactions in relation to the researcher's questions revealed general feelings of surprise and curiosity since the topic of different nationalities and cultures in the workplace has not been identified as a difficulty for them. Several respondents referred to preconceptions and assumptions one might carry as a negative aspect of intercultural interactions which might lead to unfriendly behaviours or difficulties in the workplace.

However, this has not been noticed in their work groups, since cultural empathy was mentioned as part of their personalities guiding them towards a more flexible design of work as well as towards a higher level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. The combination of their personal characteristics together with the company's values towards multiculturalism seemed to have contributed to their design of work. Matveev & Milter (2004) have demonstrated how a mutual understanding among team members can result in more solutions rather than problems and have also concentrated on the invaluable assistance of this understanding when aiming to nurture a cooperative working environment.

High-performance multicultural teams have been connected, by previous research, with diverse perspectives, various problem-solving skills and the ability to perform under changing circumstances and approaches (Crotty & Brett, 2012; Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015; Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander & Maznevski, 2010). The capacity of each respondent to connect or stay distant from another's worldview was clearly connected with their personality orientation as described by Matveev & Milter's (2004) model (see Chapter 3) and with their personal, cultural or professional values.

6.2.2   Individual Interaction Skills and Behaviours

When the participants were asked to exemplify a few skills that make their team unique or just efficient and productive, capabilities such as diverse thinking, open communication, patience and active listening were mentioned. Matveev & Milter (2004) defined skills and behaviours of intercultural competence as the capability of appropriately choosing one's interaction style and clearly communicating with other team members notwithstanding their background or preferences. Most of the skills reported by the participants were eventually connected with interpersonal levels of communication rather than with technical and professional abilities. By summarizing all of their comments, cultural differences did not seem to affect any of the complementary skills that were named afterwards, with coordination and the direction of achieving common goals being the most cited ones. Furthermore, the components of personality orientation and individual skills were described as of equal importance for the productivity of each team and by the end of the research, it became evident that they were interconnected when analysing changes in the team members' interaction styles and behaviours.

In addition to that, major changes have not been noticed in the styles of each team member since these were established earlier on in their working lives when they were students or employees in previous organizations, within and outside Sweden. However, these skills of effective interaction and collaboration were enhanced during their time in the case company, as was specified by a few of them or became, to a certain degree, natural for all of them to maintain and develop them for the benefit of the team.

6.2.3 Current Cultural Knowledge and Future Commitment

The analysis of the empirical findings brought to light the hesitation of the participants to take part in future ventures or cultural training held by the company. Most of the respondents were unsure about their answer about enhancing and evolving their current cultural knowledge by participating in formal pieces of training and workshops. This could be explained by the nature of their work and by the fact that cultural differences are not an integral part of their working routine and area of expertise. Moreover, all of them clarified that this would not be their priority since the communication climate is not problematic at the moment and only in case it was, they would consider prioritizing this kind of training over their work duties and projects.

Matveev & Milter (2004) believed that both managers and team members should be part of training and knowledge development strategies in order to establish a solution-focused working environment and develop further the complex capability of intercultural competence. In this study, the results showed that cultural knowledge was motivated by the diverse structure of the case company and by each participant's interest and eagerness to be part of an empowered team. The age of most of the participants and their previous international experience have been once again considered major contributing factors to the cultural knowledge gained over the years.

Lastly, whereas all of the interviewees expressed a strong focus on their duties and business goals, part of them were willing to learn more about achieving a consensus-based work environment and obtain more practical information on accommodating various cultures in their workforce.

7 Conclusion

This section aims to outline the findings, contributions and reflections of the case study in accordance with the initial purpose as stated in chapter 1. In addition, a few recommendations for future academic researchers and business practitioners are presented.

The purpose of this thesis was to explore and understand the processes of collaboration and communication among culturally diverse teams and investigate the outcomes of this association, as perceived from the team members' and managers' perspectives. In meeting this purpose, the analysis has shown that personality characteristics and individual skills were the main contributing factor to effective interaction and collaboration. Other factors mentioned during the participants' narratives were their previous or ongoing cultural knowledge as well as the company's efforts and support. The majority of the participants also referred to the difficulties that occurred during their adjustment processes and their joint projects as a team. However, these issues were described as secondary and insignificant which revealed that the focal point of all of the participants was to efficiently conduct their day-to-day work regardless of minor issues appearing in their interactions. Furthermore, this study concluded that most of the challenges and difficulties noticed within the teams were not related to cultural differences and most of the respondents made a clear separation among nationalities and cooperation issues. Moreover, during the research, it was noted that any forms of stereotypical assumptions or generalizations were not a part of their working environment and each team member was very careful in formulating their answers objectively. In conclusion, the case company appeared to be inclusive with the intention to engage its employees and promote diverse perspectives on a daily basis. Various factors might have contributed to the establishment of intercultural competence in this workplace with a few of them being connected to the creation of a strong leadership model on the upper and lower management level, the continuous representation of company values and corporate culture as well as employees' collaboration skills and multicultural backgrounds.

The capability to behave, operate and manage efficiently in a diverse environment or in a multicultural setting, has been defined by several previous researchers as cultural intelligence (Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Lorenz, Ramsey & Richey, 2018; Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne & Annen, 2011; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018; Van Dyne et al., 2012). The element of intercultural communication competence in cultural intelligence was the centre of attention for this case study

and was examined from an individual and group approach by focusing on team members' experiences and group processes respectively. Adair, Hideg & Spence (2013) mention that just as work culture can be emergent and established by following organizational values and norms, equally team interactions can be shifted when team members decide to adjust their personal and cultural values in an attempt to share a common set of attitudes. These attitudes and skills in communication proved to be flexible and similar for most of the respondents in this case study which possibly defined and advanced their interaction styles according to everyone's needs and intentions which is consistent with Yeke & Semerciöz 's (2016) findings.

While there has been an effort to further discuss and analyse intercultural competence, it is still a topic focusing on general and broad definitions instead of offering direction and concrete examples. At this final point of the study, it is crucial to point out the main question that was created after the research has been completed. How can someone assess intercultural competence? As Deardorff (2004) supports, there has not been an agreement on demonstrating what is effective for an international organization or for its employees which leads us to address the effectiveness and appropriateness of policies and practices in the field of cultural differences.

7.1 Contributions and Future Research

This study elaborated on multicultural collaboration among team members and first-line managers and aspired to further contribute to previous research in the field of efficient collaboration and communication. There has been an extensive reference to cultural differences and similarities in relation to this field but only a few of them demonstrate the impact created by the team members' personalities and individual preferences. This study showed the contemporary realities of multicultural teamwork in a Swedish environment, focusing more on opportunities and similarities rather than on challenges. According to the respondents, this research can introduce an important aspect of diverse collaboration where nationalities and cultural differences are not observed in most cases. Thus, further academic research could broaden the perspective of traditional patterns in analysing cultural differences by not merely concentrating on societal and hierarchical dimensions. In regards to business practitioners, to make the most of the advancements at hand in 2023, an honest look at key challenging issues is required. The complexities of the ever-changing and diverse working environment ask for ways to foster a culture of dynamic collaboration and agile working. This thesis highlighted the importance of acquiring intercultural competence in an

international setting to amplify effective communication and cooperation by supporting committed leaders and constantly educating devoted workers. A stepping stone for HR practitioners in order to identify their weaknesses and invest in multiculturalism is to consider these strategies during the stages of recruitment, onboarding and training & development. Expanding current cultural knowledge and dedicating to employees' upskilling is vital for organizations that want to be part of the global labour market which is fast-growing, demanding and competitive.

This thesis aimed to provide an exploratory approach to multicultural teamwork in a software company with most of its employees based in Sweden. One suggestion for subsequent research would be to study a sample of employees who have recently joined an international/multicultural organization, perhaps for the first time in their working lives, in order to analyse how they were able to adjust and evolve during that transition. The findings of that future research could be compared or built upon the results of this thesis while also examining collaboration in different work settings and sites. Another suggestion for future research would be the reexamination of this study, with the utilization of other research methods, such as questionnaires, surveys or participatory observations. By combining these different methods, it would be feasible to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, while conducting a more thorough analysis of the participants' experiences.

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Appendix

Before conducting the interviews, background information and the purpose of this study has been shared with the participants. A summary is presented below:

The information that will be gathered during this interview will be used for the specified purposes of this Master Thesis and as we discussed beforehand, it will be fully anonymized and recorded for future transcription. The purpose of this is to analyse the material afterwards by going back to our conversation.

Appendix A – Interview Guide for non-Swedish team members

Background Information

1. What is your nationality?

2. What is your native language?

3. What brought you to Sweden?

4. How long have you been living and working in Sweden? Is this your first time working in a Swedish workplace?

5. How long have you been working for this organization? What is your position in your team and the organization?

Adjustment / Adaptation

6. Do you perceive the Swedish working environment as different in significant ways, compared to workplaces in your country of origin/or in other countries where you have worked?

7. Have you adapted to the Swedish working environment or have you developed new ways of working and collaborating here?

8. Has the company provided you with any cross-cultural training when you started working here? If yes, tell me a bit more about it. If not, would you like to receive this kind of training in the future?

Communication / Collaboration

9. Have you ever felt that the different cultural backgrounds within your team lead to miscommunication or any kind of misunderstanding? Could you please share an example?

10. Have you ever felt that you have been treated in a disrespectful way, that may relate to cultural differences?

11. Do you have any experiences that surprised you about being treated respectfully?

12. What do you think is the easiest part of working in a culturally diverse team? Would you consider it as a contribution to the organization, if not why?

13. What is the hardest part of working as a part of a culturally diverse team?

14. Have you ever felt that you could not collaborate efficiently with someone because their cultural background was different from yours?

15. Have you ever heard or seen a co-worker do or say something racist or otherwise inappropriate? If yes, how did you react in that case?

Cultural Awareness / Cultural Experience

16. Do you think that cultural awareness affects your/employee's productivity?

17. In what ways has your professional development been influenced by multicultural issues? (More positive/negative attitudes and beliefs about multicultural ideologies and practices?)

18. After working as a part of a multicultural team, did you notice any changes in the way you work and communicate? If you have noticed changes, were those related to the other team members, with the managers or with both parties? Could you share an example for each case?

Company values

19. Do you consider your organization as an international workplace open to diverse cultural backgrounds? Could you share some examples showing that in practice?

20. Which language(s) do you use while interacting with other team members and/or other people outside of your team during working hours? Does it differ from the language you usually use during the breaks?

21. Could you please describe the work environment or work culture in which you are most productive and happy?

22. In your opinion, what is the most important skill for a manager to have in order to lead a multicultural team?

Extra

23. Is there anything you want to add within the topic of the conversation that you do not think has come up yet and could contribute to my study?

24. Is it possible to contact you via email if any follow-up questions arise when I analyse the material?

Appendix B – Interview Guide for Swedish team members

Background Information

1. What is your nationality?

2. How long have you been living and working in Sweden?

3. Have you worked in any other countries than Sweden in the past?

4. How long have you been working for this organization? What is your position in your team and the organization?

Adjustment / Adaptation

5. Do you perceive the Swedish working environment as different in significant ways, compared to workplaces in other countries you have worked? (If the answer to question 3 is yes)

6. Do you think that a working environment with Swedish employees only is different in significant ways as compared to a culturally diverse workplace? (If the answer to question 3 is no)

7. Have you adapted to working in a culturally diverse environment or have you developed new ways of working and collaborating here?

8. When you were trying to adapt to this environment, did you plan to learn new ways of working or adjusting here?

9. Has the company provided you with any cross-cultural training/understanding when you started working here? If yes, tell me a bit more about it. If not, would you like to receive this kind of training in the future?

Communication / Collaboration

10. Have you ever felt that the different cultural backgrounds within your team lead to miscommunication or any kind of misunderstanding? Could you please share an example?

11. Have you ever felt that the different cultural backgrounds within your team lead to more benefits rather than challenges? Could you please share an example?

12. Have you ever felt that you have been treated in a disrespectful way, that may relate to cultural differences?

13. Do you have any experiences that surprised you about being treated respectfully?

14. What do you think is the easiest part of working in a culturally diverse team? Would you consider it as a contribution to the organization, if not why?

15. What is the hardest part of working as a part of a culturally diverse team?

16. Have you ever felt that you could not collaborate efficiently with someone because their background was different from yours?

17. Have you ever heard or seen a co-worker do or say something racist or otherwise inappropriate? How did you react in that case?

Cultural Awareness / Cultural Experience

18. Do you think that cultural awareness affects your/employee's productivity?

19. In what ways has your professional development been influenced by multicultural issues? (More positive/negative attitudes and beliefs about multicultural ideologies and practices?)

20. After working as a part of a multicultural team, did you notice any changes in the way you work and communicate? If you have noticed changes, were those related to the other team members, with the managers or with both parties? Could you share an example for each case?

Company values

21. Do you consider your organization as an international workplace open to diverse cultural backgrounds? Could you share some examples showing that in practice?

22. Which language(s) do you use while interacting with other team members and/or other people outside of your team during working hours? Does it differ from the language you usually use during the breaks?

23. Could you please describe the work environment or work culture in which you are most productive and happy?

24. In your opinion, what is the most important skill for a manager to have in order to lead a multicultural team?

Extra

25. Is there anything you want to add within the topic of the conversation that you do not think has come up yet and could contribute to my study?

26. Is it possible to contact you via email if any follow-up questions arise when I analyse the material?

Appendix C – Interview Guide for non-Swedish managers

Background Information

1. What is your nationality?

2. What is your native language?

3. How long have you been living and working in Sweden? Is this your first time working in a Swedish workplace?

4. How long have you been working for this organization? What is your position in your team and the organization?

Cultural Awareness / Cultural Experience

6. Do you think that cultural awareness affects employee productivity? Do you have any policies in the organization about promoting/enhancing cultural awareness?

7. What would you consider as most challenging for an increasingly diverse working environment? What steps have you taken or plan to take to cope with those challenges?

8. After working as a manager of a multicultural team, did you notice any changes in the way you lead and communicate? Could you share an example?

Company values

8. Do you consider your organization as an international workplace open to diverse cultural backgrounds? If yes, could you share some examples showing that in practice?

9. How does cultural diversity apply in your workplace and team?

10. Do you have any ways to measure the level of cultural competence within your organization?

11. What personal/professional attitudes and other additions do candidates from different cultural backgrounds bring to the team? Would you consider those as an opportunity for the team or a challenge?

Leadership / Management

12. As a manager, can you cite specific examples of making your direct communication feel inclusive and welcome within the team?

13. Have you ever felt that you could not collaborate efficiently with someone because their background was different from yours?

14. Have you ever heard or seen a co-worker do or say something racist or otherwise inappropriate? How did you react in that case?

15. Would you say that there are underrepresented or disadvantaged groups within your organisation? If yes, what strategies would you implement to overcome this issue?

16. When managing teams with people from different cultural backgrounds, do you observe any differences as compared to managing teams with Swedish employees only?

Extra

17. Is there anything you want to add within the topic of the conversation that you do not think has come up yet and could contribute to my study?

18. Is it possible to contact you via email if any follow-up questions arise when I analyse the material?

Appendix D – Interview Guide for Swedish managers

Background Information

1. What is your nationality?

2. How long have you been living and working in Sweden?

3. Have you worked in any other countries than Sweden in the past?

4. How long have you been working for this organization? What is your position in your team and the organization?

Cultural Awareness / Cultural Experience

6. Do you think that cultural awareness affects employee productivity?

7. What would you consider as most challenging for an increasingly diverse working environment? What steps have you taken or plan to take to cope with those challenges?

8. After working as a manager of a multicultural team, did you notice any changes in the way you lead and communicate? Could you share an example?

Company values

8. Do you consider your organization as an international workplace open to diverse cultural backgrounds? If yes, could you share some examples showing that in practice?

9. How does cultural diversity apply in your workplace and team?

10. Do you have any ways to measure the level of cultural competence within your organization?

11. What personal/professional attitudes and other additions do candidates from different cultural backgrounds bring to the team? Would you consider those as an opportunity for the team or as a challenge?

Leadership / Management

12. As a manager, can you cite specific examples of making your direct communication feel inclusive and welcome within the team?

13. Have you ever felt that you could not collaborate efficiently with someone because their background was different from yours?

14. Have you ever heard or seen a co-worker do or say something racist or otherwise inappropriate? How did you react in that case?

15. Would you say that there are underrepresented or disadvantaged groups within your organisation? If yes, what strategies would you implement to overcome this issue?

16. When managing teams with people from different cultural backgrounds, do you observe any differences as compared to managing teams with Swedish employees only?

Extra

17. Is there anything you want to add within the topic of the conversation that you do not think has come up yet and could contribute to my study?

18. Is it possible to contact you via email if any follow-up questions arise when I analyse the material?

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today!