

**LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE**  
**WITH STUDENTS FROM OTHER CULTURES**  
**A video ethnography pilot study**

## 1. Introduction

The need for internationally competent managers and employees is growing rapidly in an increasingly global business environment. A growing number of managers are asked to move from country to country, adjust quickly to different cultures and work efficiently in multinational teams. Daily interaction with people having different values, behavioural norms, and ways of perceiving reality is becoming the norm rather than the exception. (Chen, 1997; Finger & Kathoefer, 2005; Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005; Salo-Lee, 2006) Consequently, intercultural competence (ICC), i.e. “the ability to understand the meaning of intercultural interaction and the ability to adapt one’s behaviour to these meanings in order to produce efficient behaviour” (Bartel-Radic, 2006, pp. 650-651), is required from both the managers and the employees.

However, the challenge in educating future business people may be less about providing them with country or culture specific knowledge rather it is in facilitating active learning that leads to the increase of skills and capabilities of adjusting quickly to different cultures and work efficiently and effectively in multicultural teams. (Earley & Peterson, 2004) Even though there seems to be a consensus on the need to give attention to the cultural aspects of international business, there is still uncertainty about how ICC can be fostered. This is a challenge facing those engaged in International Business education at universities. (Briguglio, 2007; Ottewill & Laughton, 2000; Ramburuth & Welch, 2005)

At the same time, there is a massive change going on at the classrooms of the universities. Due to the internationalisation of higher education and migration the

student population is becoming culturally more diverse. International experience is increasingly seen as part of university education and more and more students are taking part of their degree in a foreign university. Consequently, there is also an increasing number of international students in home campus. (Zirra, 2006)

On the one hand, growing cultural diversity in the classroom is still often seen as a hindrance for learning and something that needs to be “taken care off” (cf. Cant, 2004; Woods et al., 2006). On the other hand, cultural diversity in the classroom can be used to provide students with valuable practical experience of cross-cultural situations (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). International students may widen both the instructor’s and other students’ perspectives on the world.

Past research indicates ICC is partially dependent on personality traits, but it can also be acquired by learning (Bartel-Radic, 2006, 651; Levy et al., 2007). It seems, however, wrong to rely on that simply by being in a multicultural classroom would make the students more competent in acting in intercultural settings (Busby, 1993). Diversity needs to be managed (Iles, 1995), which means actively encouraging both local and international students to learn from each other and assisting them to think critically about their cultural experiences.

When multicultural classrooms are deliberately used for building ICCs of students (cf. Woods et al., 2006), it is important to be able to assess the outcome; i.e. can multicultural classroom really make a difference in students’ competences? There are various surveys measuring students’ ICC. Most of them are related to the international experience outside home country (e.g. Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Fantini, 2007), i.e. the

home internationalisation taking place in the multicultural class rooms within the home university has not been paid attention to.

Cognitive and affective components have been measured and surveyed (e.g. Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Fantini, 2007; Chen & Starosta, 2000). However, previous research indicates that it is very hard to measure how students' intercultural behaviour changes. We also noticed this when we tried to track down the changes in ICCs in one course at the our business school<sup>1</sup>. This may be due to the fact that measuring behaviour with a questionnaire is very difficult (Silverman, 2001). Traditional deductive methodologies (e.g., surveys) are failing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) may be because they are out of step with the complexities that they are supposed to measure. Various qualitative methods may be useful to employ as they make possible for complexity to become central rather than marginal to the analytical process (Carroll et al., 2008). Research on higher education in general, and IB education in particular should shift faster towards such modes of investigation. This we may support with our additional interviews with instructors and students as well as preliminary class work observation, which indicated that there may have been slight change in students' behaviour, which changes by survey could not be brought fore. At first in many groups students tried to proceed fast and make decisions based on brief communication. However, after a couple of misunderstandings and hesitant decisions, students learned to listen to each other more carefully e.g., paying more attention on the communication and joint understanding.

The survey, interviews and earlier class room observation provided tentative but not yet adequate evidence, whether one course could change student's behavioural skills related

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<sup>1</sup> The previous studies are reported in two conference papers but due to the blind review process of this paper, these references are not included in this paper.

to ICCs. However, perhaps through a more carefully-planned observation of students' learning we would be able to see whether the students would learn to adapt their communication style into other cultures and to take better into account the problems caused by misunderstandings. Consequently, the purpose of the new study, presented in this paper, *is to analyse how do students learn to communicate with other students coming from different cultural backgrounds during one course.*

The theoretical background of the paper is founded in the preview of the literature discussing the effects of cultural diversity in teams and the elements of cultural competence. After that, our more carefully designed observation, which employed video ethnographic approach, is described and findings presented. The paper concludes by providing implications and discussing limitations and future research directions.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. Cultural diversity in a class room**

Culture guides the meaning that people attach to aspects of the world around them. Schein (1985, p.9) defined culture as “a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problem of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems”. According to Hofstede (1980),

culture consists of a commonly held body of beliefs and values that define the 'should' and the 'ought' of life.

There exists a substantial body of research into the role of cultural diversity in teams and team outcomes. However, this research has produced mixed and often contradictory results (Stahl et al., 2010). Cultural distance is a widely used construct in IB, however establishing a measure of distance between cultures is still considered a considerable challenge (Shenkar, 2001).

Cultural distance between individuals has been often measured by Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of culture. These are: power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. His classification, although extensively used, has also been widely criticised. In considering Shenkar's criticism (2001) of how cultural distance is conceptualized, and with the help of that conceptualization the effect of cultural diversity understood in international organizations, we should be careful in considering cultural distance symmetric, aware of that culture changes over time, and should not assume geographical/spatial homogeneity. From a cognitive perspective, adjustment to a relatively similar culture may be as difficult as adjustment to a 'distant' one. It has also been claimed that Hofstede's classification increase stereotype-based thinking and ignoring the individual differences. This was also noted by Pritchard and Skinner (2002) who specifically studied partnerships between home and international students. They noticed that the students of a particular nationality did not always fall into categories that would be expected based on Hofstede's work. Furthermore, the four dimensions of Hofstede, may not have equivalent effects on various kinds of interactions. In class room interaction power distance dimension seems to be particularly important for

assessing teacher-student relationship, but it is not likely to have a major role in the interaction within student teams.

Thus, even though Hofstede's dimensions of culture may be helpful in increasing our understanding on cultural diversity they need to be applied with caution. When considering the interaction in international teams one could assume that students coming from individualistic countries are more likely to express openly negative emotions and they also accept open expressions of others. They also tend to pay more attention on verbal reactions than nonverbal behaviour. (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) Differences in students' backgrounds along the masculinity dimension can be assumed to be particularly visible in gender roles in teams. It also seems that students coming from masculine countries tend to see more competition in class and overrate their own performance, whereas for those coming from feminine countries failing may not be so big incident. One could also assume that in teams in which students are coming from countries with higher uncertainty avoidance tend to contemplate alternatives more carefully and make decisions slower than those coming from countries representing lower uncertainty avoidance.

Past studies (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Tsui et al., 1992) indicate that team members' similarity enhances effectiveness and interpersonal attraction, but also decreases the variety of perspectives and skills possessed by the team (Maznevski, 1994). Watson et al. (1993, p. 598) state that "it would seem to be unwise to expect newly formed groups with a substantial degree of cultural diversity to be able to solve problems very effectively. Furthermore, in homogeneous teams the unified team culture tends to develop shortly after team formation, whereas in highly heterogeneous teams it may take substantially long time. (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000) However, Watson et al.

(1993) came to the conclusion that in the long run the overall performance of culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous teams is likely to be the same for both teams.

Stahl et al (2010) summarized three theories, which assert in three different ways how cultural diversity affects on teams. The similarity-attraction theory posits that people are attracted to working and cooperating with those they find similar in terms of culture. People from same culture know that they share basic values, so they connect easily. In applying this theoretical lens, cultural diversity has negative effects on teams. Intercultural student teams need to be well-managed for the best results, since students have a natural tendency to form groups with those with whom they feel more comfortable. The basic idea in the social identity/categorization theory is that people categorize themselves into specific groups and categorize others as outsider. They treat insiders of their own group with favouritism. The categorization can be quick and long lasting. Also from this perspective cultural diversity affects teams negatively. The third perspective – information-processing theory – identifies positive effects of cultural diversity on teams. According to it, diversity brings different contributions to teams because the team members bring very different sources and means of information-processing. Thus, the team can cover broader territory of information and tap into broader range of networks and perspectives. As team outcome, this may result in enhanced problem-solving, creativity, innovation and adaptability.

On the one hand, we can agree with Parkhe (1991, in Shenkar, 2001) that cultural differences have the potential for both, synergy and disruption. On the other hand, how different one culture is from another has little meaning until those cultures are brought into contact with one another, i.e., interaction is the key issue (Shenkar, 2001).



## 2.2. Behavior as a part of the students' intercultural competences

Cultural competence implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual (and an organization) within the context of or exposure to different cultural beliefs, behaviors and needs.

The assessment of ICC development is complicated by a multifaceted nature of the concept. Cultural competence is also a learning process that evolves overtime. (Bartel-Radic, 2006; Levy et al., 2007). It is often divided into cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects (e.g. Ruben, 1976; Cardel, 1990). *Cognitive* component (intercultural awareness) refers to how much an individual knows about cultural practices in general; about his/her own culture and the specific cultures of the others. It is assumed that increased intercultural awareness implies increased understanding of different ways of thinking and behaving. (Neuliep, 2006; Yu et al., 2001; Cardel. 1990; Matveev & Milter, 2004) According to Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004), the sources from which awareness is gained are instances of the culture in action, connections with previous experience, comparisons with other cultures, conflicts caused by cultural misunderstanding and resolving those through accommodation, reflections and interpretations of the significance of cultural behavior.

Knowledge however is not sufficient; individuals need to have a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences (Chen, 1997; Ruben, 1976). This leads us to consider the *affective* component (intercultural sensitivity) comprising of empathy, non-judgement and sensitivity to others' needs (Chen, 1997). Cognitive and affective components are the prerequisites for the *behaviour* aspect in which individuals

conduct themselves effectively during intercultural interactions (Chen, 1997; Ruben, 1976; Sizoo et al., 2007). According to Cardel (1990, 345) behavioural component is the most important since “it does not help [an individual] much to have positive attitudes and a lot of knowledge about local cultures if he is unable to express it”. In other words, effective behavior should be the final aim for people who want to gain ICC.

Since the behaviour in intercultural situations mostly relates to communication, behavioural component has often been called also as communicative component (e.g., Cardel, 1990; Iles, 1995). An effective communication means comprehending in both verbal messages and nonverbal cues. While verbal messages always involve some nonverbal cues, nonverbal messages can be transferred without a verbal message (Graf & Mertesacker, 2009). The essence of effective intercultural communication is to minimize mistakes via both verbal and non-verbal communication and to release the right responses rather than sending the right messages.

The behaviour component of ICCs can be, thus, defined as the ability to exhibit situationally appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures (Egan & Bendick, 2008; Ruben, 1976).

### **2.3. Verbal and non-verbal behaviour in intercultural teams**

Verbal behaviour in teams can be analysed in the light of three tasks: Production, group well-being, and member support. *Production tasks* are performed to complete the team assignment and they may be further divided into conveyance and convergence. The former encompassing activities related to the dissemination and sharing information in

order to understand the situation, whereas the latter meaning resolving differences in interpretations in order to reach a shared understanding and mutual agreement. *Group well-being tasks* contribute to the team itself e.g. by developing behavioural norms and coordination within the group. *Member support tasks* are associated with developing individual relationships and social interaction with other team members. (McGrath, 1991; Hung & Nguyen, 2008)

When analysing intercultural teams one should also take into account the differences in *language skills*. The interaction among members from different language groups and the application of that common language may greatly influence on team communication and the members' willingness to participate in the collaboration. (Hung & Nguyen, 2008; Kayworth & Leidner, 2000) Hence, *checking and conforming* are also necessary skills. In intercultural situations individuals often need to check that they have understood the message conveyed right. This requires constant checking and conforming through e.g. asking questions and observing. In fact, the study by Gudykunst (1983) indicates people ask more questions when others are culturally dissimilar.

When estimating verbal communication one should also take into account *silence*. Analysing silence is however very complicated, since it is often difficult to know the intentionality of silence. Silence may be a sign of frustration, politeness, just a pause for thinking or it may indicate the inability to speak due to embarrassment. (Nakane, 2006)

Birdwhistell (1970) claims that 65% of meaning is conveyed nonverbally. Koschmann and LeBaron (2002) argue that gestures are more than auxiliary communicative devices – they are actions that shape and help reflexively constitute a social order that cannot be

separated from the understandings that interactionally emerge through learning processes. They suggested that not only the verbal communication has to be focused on but also how learners use their hands and bodies in the process of displaying their understandings. Actually, the already theorized discordance between talk and gesture reflects the fact that gesture provides a bridge between two-rule-governed knowledge-states, i.e., an advance from an inadequate yet systematic understanding to a more adequate, systematic one (Koschmann & LeBaron, 2002). Studying the ‘conversation of gesture’ may contribute importantly of how participants articulate cultural competences (i.e., behave according to what they know).

Nonverbal communication can be divided into kinesics, proxemics, and artifactual communication. *Kinesics* refers to bodily movements and includes eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and gestures. The latter can be further divided into emblems and illustrators. Emblems are gestures that can be put into words and explained, such as nodding or shaking the head, whereas illustrators cannot be expressed in words. *Proxemics* refers to the use of space in an interaction. The distance to other people that people feel comfortable with varies between situations, genders and cultures (Hall, 1966). Artifactual communication refers to how people use clothing, bodily adornments and make-up to communicate with others.

Since non-verbal behaviour is largely unconscious and differs in different cultures, one would assume that even though students working in intercultural teams would be able to turn their verbal message into another language, often English, non-verbal messages tend not to be translated or reformulated. This may create discomfort and misunderstandings in culturally heterogeneous teams.

Learning in multicultural class is conditional on communication among students with diverse cultural background and skill sets (cf. Carroll et al., 2008). They have to manage and communicate information that is obtained from multiple sources and the information they have to integrate into the team-based decision making. The intensification and frequency of communication has to be seen by the students for the reason of maintaining connection, dependencies and relationships and for reflecting on and negotiating the process of communication as well as the substance of the information that is communicated.

Management of teams includes that the benefits of working in multinational groups need to be made clear and the teacher needs to be prepared to act as a mediator in conflicts within groups. (Briguglio, 2007; Cheney, 2001; cf. Middleton & Rodgers, 1999; Woods et al., 2006) Diversity within a group makes trust building and consensus development more difficult, and conflicts within groups tend to arise sooner or later. Conflicts can, however, be very valuable in gaining understanding and increasing appreciation of cultural differences if they are managed properly. It is thus important that the teacher is able to make the students learn from embarrassing moments. (Bartel-Radic, 2006; Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005) Multicultural classrooms provide an arena for the students to practice conflict management and often teachers are also helping them in conflict resolution.

We may assume that one course which forces students with different cultural backgrounds to interact, negotiate and resolve conflicts with each other may actually have an influence on the intercultural behavioural skills of the students.

### **3. Research approach**

In the present paper we argue for employing video ethnographic observation for developing our understanding of change in the behavior element of cultural competence during group work. As MacDougall (1998, 2006) proposed, the video ethnographic method's potential is to allow us to see social behavior and culture as a continuous process of interpretation and reinvention. Studying interaction in context of collaborative problem solving allows us to study learning as an interactional rather than a mental phenomenon. (Cf. Shenkar, 2001) Based on the theoretical insights (section 2) we argue that this step is a valuable intermediate in accounting for behavioral change.

“Ethnography is a research processes by which investigators observe what people do, investigate what people say they think, believe and do and then interpret what people actually think and believe relative to what they do.” (Ventres et al., 2005) Video-taping can be a core component in studies in which visual cues and expressions that form the sub-text of communication are revealing.

Using real-time video data, we aim to capitalize on the complexity of in situ practices rather than reduce it to abstract models or simplified case studies (cf. Carroll et al., 2008). The use of video is crucial in the sense that the visual medium enables us to recognize the distributed, un-spoken and risk prone dimensions of the taken for granted sayings, knowing and doing of the students.

Communication is more than action; it is interaction through which we built social reality. How and when we talk may be more important that what we say. Communication has consequences for others, for their actions and for the context that

we experience together. In acknowledging this, one sees reality as social construction, created, modified and interpreted by individuals. Information is thus regarded as relative, subjective, fragmented and ambiguous. (Burrell & Morgan, 1988, pp. 2–7; Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Video-ethnography is interdisciplinary as it relies on the analysis of both conversation and context. It employs observation which is rooted in anthropology, conversation analysis which is rooted in sociology and context analysis which has its roots in psychology. Video-ethnography is a micro-ethnography as it aims at getting the big issues through studying of small issues. Visualization enlarges by bringing background aspects of practice to the fore and invests them with immediacy. At the same time, it also diminishes practices by including some interaction at the expense of others. It also reduces socio-cultural practice to the size of the screen (MacDougall, 2006). With these in mind, interpretive claims are rigorously grounded in the empirical details of naturally occurring behavior that was recorded.

In this study, the understanding is gained through *describing and analysing* the communication (content) in the different phases of the course (the process), taking only moderately into account the contributory roles of the course and teachers (the context). This is in line with Pettigrew's (1992) suggestion that in processual research on change one should take into account all the three aspects. However, he also suggests that even though all the three aspects ought to be taken into account they usually cannot be equally emphasised within one limited research project. Thus, in this research the purpose of the study directs the attention into the process and content, leaving the context to the background.

Next we describe how we collected video-ethnographic data and how we analyzed it. The analysis section presents the issues that become apparent on observing and filming. This includes the selection of footage for analysis guided by the conceptual knowledge discussed in section 2 and methodological considerations.

### **3.1. Data collection**

In practice, the video-observation meant paying systematically attention into specific features of students' behaviour (such as verbal and certain types of nonverbal communication) but also trying to form a more holistic understanding on what was going on in the interaction between the students. The latter meant paying attention on activities, events and apparent feelings in the class room (cf. Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The purpose of the study clearly directed to select one course on which to focus. It was rather natural to select the same course on which we had collected data earlier. The course utilises a computerised business simulation programme (INTOPIA). Explicitly, one of the aims of the course is to build international competences for students and to learn them to act better in intercultural groups. Choosing this course was supported by the fact that it was awarded a couple of years ago as the best in our country in developing business students' ICCs.

In the course, culturally heterogeneous group of around 40 students is divided into small teams (2-3 persons) – so called companies – with the tasks of finding solutions to



simulated managerial problems. In practice, students form multinational companies that manufacture computers or computer parts. During the game they need to both co-operate and compete with other teams.

Data collection took place 26.10.2009 – 2.12.2009. The course itself consists of 7 lectures (2 hours each) and eight ‘game sessions’ (approximately 3 hours each). Due to the interactiveness and intensiveness of the course it had 2 teachers both of them present in each teaching session. We did not have any role in teaching, but knew some of the students beforehand and the teachers with whom we have been close colleagues for years.

Ethically, it is important that students were aware of the research and participated voluntarily. Therefore, in the beginning the students were told briefly about the research, made it clear that we were not participating in the course evaluation, and also told them to contact the principal observer or the teachers in case they would not want to take part in the research. The observation schedule was decided after discussing with the teachers. Importantly, it was possible to arrange recordings so that material was collect from the first (2.11.2009) and last game sessions (25.11.2009) and also from the middle (11.11.2009).

In the course the teams are formed by the teachers so that team members present different nationalities. It was not possible to record the behaviour of all the teams and it was thought that observing two teams would be enough to see the possible behavioural change. In order to be able to focus on intercultural communication the students in the selected teams were of the same gender. In one of the selected team the cultural difference was not too big and in the other it was significantly bigger. The selected

teams were Finger and Royal Chips. (In the beginning of the course students themselves gave imaginary names for their teams.) In Finger there were two young men, one from Germany and the other one from Finland. Royal Chips was formed by two young men, one from Portugal and the other one from Finland.

Recording was in practice done by establishing cameras in front of the selected teams and otherwise being in the background. Even though the sessions were recorded it was necessary for one of us to participate and take care of the cameras. At first the teams seemed to be somewhat bothered by the cameras, but since the game sessions were rather long and fast-paced, they soon seemed to relax and forget that their behaviour was recorded. Game sessions were rather turbulent, students moving from one team to the other and negotiating with each other and the teachers. They had a specific dead line for each session by which they needed to be ready but they could arrive any time and finish earlier.

### **3.2. Data analysis and trustworthiness of the study**

The empirical data for this study was abundant in form of recorded material on three sessions of both teams. The recordings were couple of hours each. We are aware that the choices we made about transcription greatly affect the results (cf. Bird, 2005; Silverman, 2001). As Bird (2005) says, in transcriptions one needs to balance accuracy and efficiency. We chose to transcribe and analyse ten minutes of interaction from both teams in each three session. Transcription started at the beginning of the recording and lasted until 10 minutes were done. Since the sessions were very dynamic, it was decided not to transcribe those parts where there was no room for interaction between the team's

students, but transcribe only interactive time. ‘Interactive time’ means that the students were working together in a team, without interaction with other students or teachers. Also the time when students were both present in a team but not interacting directly (e.g. one reading, the other computing) was considered as ‘interactive time’, since they were still working together for their team.

The analysis began already at the transcription stage by reflecting on the theoretical background of the research and made transcription decisions based on that. In order to be able to analyse the communication, the verbal conversation we have transcribed word-by-word. The duration of the silence was measured when the silence lasted much longer than usual. Since the students were sitting behind the computers and the computers partly hindered video recording the nonverbal communication that was possible to transcribe included smiles, laughs and eye-contact. For measuring the eye-contact precisely one would have needed to have special recording, but with what we saw on videos we were able at least to mark down the clear eye-contacts and based on that get a general understanding of the eye-contacts in both teams.

The data on both teams was then organised by dividing it into verbal and nonverbal communication. Chronological flow of events was also taken into account in the analysis and the principal researcher/observer wrote a brief description on both teams, which we present in the section 4.1. These descriptions are the interpretation about the overall interaction of the teams in which some direct citations are included. The citations are to justify the interpretations and to enliven the descriptions. All in all, the analysis of the data was a continuous process that required repeated reading of the transcription files and the notes. It involved returning to the theoretical literature and to the empirical data with additional ideas. We consider our research *credible* (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985) on the grounds of familiarising ourselves with the theoretical background before entering the field (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994). We had observed the same course in the previous years, thus had some pre-understanding of the class room interaction. Based on these, the results reflect our understanding of the students' communication and learning. Even though we had interview and survey data from the previous year which could enlighten the issues, this data naturally did not tell anything about these particular students.

In terms of securing *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) we have described the data in such detail that the potential appliers are able to judge for themselves. We hope that the descriptions of the course in the section 3.1 and of the teams in the section 4.1 provide the readers with enough information to enable them to assess the transferability to other contexts. *Dependability* indicates how dependent the findings of the study are on the inquiry itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We did not teach in this course, and knowing one of the observed students did not influence on his behaviour; at least he was the only student swearing openly. We tried to enhance *confirmability* by writing detailed description of both teams and illustrating the results with citations. Here, in this section, we have also reported the research process in detail, so that readers are able to evaluate how the research was conducted and how the findings were drawn.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Description of the studied teams

Finger team was formed by a Finnish and German male student, both in their early 20's. Royal Chips had two male students, a Finnish and a Portuguese, both also in their early 20's. Thus, the teams were in many aspects (e.g. age, gender) similar but the cultural distance can be regarded to be much bigger in Royal Chips. Table 1 shows how the team members' home countries are situated on Hofstede's classification. The scores of Finland and Portugal seem to differ significantly in three dimensions: power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance, whereas in 'individualism' they are rather similar. Finland and Germany differ in 'individualism' but are rather similar in other three dimensions.

Table 1 Cultural dimensions of team members' home countries (Hofstede, 2001)

	<i>Power Distance</i>	<i>Individualism</i>	<i>Masculinity</i>	<i>Uncertainty Avoidance</i>
<i>Finland</i>	33	63	26	59
<i>Germany</i>	35	67	66	65
<i>Portugal</i>	63	27	31	104

The overall impression of communication within the teams was that in team Finger the students seemed to be much more active, talkative, enjoying and working as a team, ever since the first team meeting. Decision making was also much faster in Finger, which one could have been assumed based on the fact that Portugal scored high in Hofstede's uncertainty dimension. At least in these teams it was clearly seen that team Finger was fast and in the team Royal Chips it was the Portuguese who often wanted to contemplate the decisions more. One this kind of incident is illustrated in the following quotation:

*Finnish student: What to order?*

*Portuguese student: I don't know [makes the gesture of 'be careful'] we need to check.*

*[Teacher: OK!]*

*Finnish student: We need to rush [laughs]*

*Portuguese student: Wait a sec.*

Royal Chips team was rather quiet. Sometimes it seems like it was not a team, but more like two persons working alone, but just sitting side by side. Still, the members of the Royal Chips seemed to be comfortable with each other; at least there were no signs of hostility. The performance of the teams was evaluated based on how well they succeeded in the game. In the end, both teams were equally successful and when compared to other teams participating in the game they ranked in the middle. This seems to support the findings by Watson et al. (1993) and Earley and Mosakowski (2000) presented in the chapter 2.1, that even though it takes a while for heterogeneous teams to become effective, in the end this time-lag does not affect the overall performance.

## **4.2. Verbal communication within a team**

There seemed to be no difference in language skills of the observed students. All were fluent in expressing their thoughts in English. When the teams' behaviours are analysed according to the three tasks discussed in the chapter 2.2 there is a clear difference between the teams. Tables 2 and 3 show the number of communication incidents related to different tasks during the ten minutes observation. It shows that verbal communication in team Finger was more active and that in Finger communication related to group well-being was much more frequent than in Royal Chips.

Table 2 Verbal behaviour in team Finger

	Production tasks		Group well-being tasks	Member support tasks	Total
	Conveyance	Convergence			
In the beginning of the course	3	4	4	0	11
In the middle of the course	6	4	5	1	16
In the end of the course	8	9	1	1	19
Total	17	17	10	2	

Table 3 Verbal behaviour in team Royal Chips

	Production tasks		Group well-being tasks	Member support tasks	Total
	Conveyance	Convergence			
In the beginning of the course	2	7	0	0	9
In the middle of the course	5	4	2	0	11
In the end of the course	4	3	0	0	7
Total	11	14	2	0	

Communication related on group well-being in team Finger was mostly related to what they will do in the future and how good they were. Here are some examples of the latter:

*German student: We're so nice*

*Finnish student: Yeah.*

And later:

*Finnish student: We're fast*

*German student: Fast.*

Finger team also talked more about other groups. It was clearly them against the others.

Here is an example of this:

*Finnish student: This one. They are like satellite [speaking about other group]*

*[German student laughs and shakes his head]*

*Finnish student: ...behind a quarter. So they need to find something.*

Even though team Finger was fast in the business game they also engaged in social interaction:

*German student: This season is quite popular, right? With all the pre-Christmas parties?*

*Finnish student: Yeah. There is... many Christmas parties!*

There was no such off-the topic discussion in the team Royal Chips. Besides, even the communication related to group well-being was not as bold and joyful as in the other team:

*Finnish student: Ok. Now we have to work more carefully with costs.*

All in all the verbal communication was rather scarce. A typical example of communication in the Royal Chips is as follows:

*[Both lean over the same paper]*

*Finnish student [Pointing something and shaking his head]: What's that percentage?*

*Portuguese student [Points something on the paper]: And them?*

*[Finnish student shakes his head. Both a read a while the paper and then the Finnish student starts writing on computer.]*

Consequently there was much more silence in the Royal Chips. In the last session the silence lasted over seven minutes, when both were just working at their computers in silence. In the team Finger also both often worked at their own computers but the silence did not last long, usually less than 30 seconds. The longest silence in team Finger was 53 seconds. In the team Finger students were also verbally telling what they will do, when only one of them left to negotiate with other teams. The student that stayed followed keenly what the other was discussing in other side of the class room. In Royal Chips the team members tended to just disappear:

*[Suddenly Portuguese student leaves saying nothing, Finn wakes up from his papers and looks around, then starts to look at his computer. Portuguese student comes back, without saying anything or looking at each other both start to stare at the same computer.]*



There seemed to be no significant change in verbal communication along the course. However, when observing the Royal Chips team there were two *incidents* in the first meeting that seemed to slightly change the students' behaviour towards each other. First, another team came to negotiate with Royal Chips and they only directed their communication to the Finnish team member. Finnish student was answering to them and even made an offer without consulting the Portuguese. After this incident the Finnish and Portuguese communicated even less with each other and the communication of the Finnish seemed more like teaching:

*Finnish student: First we take this... and adding this... [looking at Portuguese]*

*[Portuguese student nodding]*

*Finnish student: Fixed costs... making it 40... 2 ... so it is .... 5 per unit [Portuguese keeps on nodding] and then we add another product [Finnish student smiling, explaining to the Portuguese student what they will do.*

*Portuguese nodding, but seems hesitant]*

Thus, it seemed that Finnish student did not rely on the Portuguese student's business knowledge. However, the atmosphere changed when Portuguese started to disagree with the Finn and actually proved that his calculations were wrong. After that the Finn started to pay more attention on the Portuguese and also direct eye-contact between the two increased.

### **4.3. Nonverbal communication within a team**

Tables 4 and 5 show the eye contacts in both teams counted during the observed 10 minutes sessions. Quite surprisingly eye contact was more used by the team Royal Chips, which otherwise seemed not to be as communicative as the team Finger. The low

number of eye contacts in the last session of Royal Chips may be explained by the fact that the seven minute's silent computer working session took place then.

Table 4 Eye contacts in team Finger

	Finnish student looking at the German student	German student looking at the Finnish student	Direct eye-contact	<i>Total</i>
In the beginning of the course	5	4	8	17
In the middle of the course	14	5	12	31
In the end of the course	12	10	5	27
<i>Total</i>	31	19	25	

Table 5 Eye contacts in team Royal Chips

	Finnish student looking at the Portuguese student	Portuguese student looking at the Finnish student	Direct eye-contact	<i>Total</i>
In the beginning of the course	23	13	11	47
In the middle of the course	24	10	21	55
In the end of the course	6	7	6	19
<i>Total</i>	53	30	38	

The number of smiles is presented in the following tables (Tables 6 & 7). There were more smiles in Finger but actually the difference is not so big.

Table 6 Smiles in team Finger

	Finnish student smiling	German student smiling	Finnish and German student smiling together	<i>Total</i>
In the beginning of the course	1	3	1	5
In the middle of the course	5	4	2	11
In the end of the course	2	4	4	10
<i>Total</i>	8	11	7	

Table 7 Smiles in team Royal Chips

	Finnish student smiling	Portuguese student smiling	Finnish and Portuguese student smiling together	<i>Total</i>
In the beginning of the course	2	2	1	5
In the middle of the course	4	1	1	6
In the end of the course	2	1	1	4
<i>Total</i>	8	4	3	

However, when one compares the number of laughs there is a clear difference. In team Finger students laughed a lot, ever since the first meeting, and they laughed together, whereas in team Royal Chips the Finnish student laughed twice and that was it.

Table 8 Laughs in team Finger

	Finnish student laughing	German student laughing	Finnish and German student laughing together	<i>Total</i>
In the beginning of the course	3	1	4	8
In the middle of the course	1	2	2	5
In the end of the course	0	4	4	8
<i>Total</i>	4	7	10	

Table 9 Laughs in team Royal Chips

	Finnish student laughing	Portuguese student laughing	Finnish and Portuguese student laughing together	<i>Total</i>
In the beginning of the course	1	0	0	1
In the middle of the course	0	0	0	0
In the end of the course	1	0	0	1
<i>Total</i>	2	0	0	

The Portuguese student used many ‘Mediterranean’ gestures, such as the signs of money, others and ‘be careful’, whether these were noticed or understood by the Finn remains unknown, but at least this supports the thought presented in the section 2.3 that

nonverbal messages are not easily reformulated in intercultural settings. All in all the analysis of nonverbal behaviour does not indicate changes along the course.

## **5. Discussion and implications**

This study focused on one course, in which teachers deliberately utilised cultural diversity in competence development. In the course students were divided into multicultural teams and they had to make together various managerial decisions and negotiate with other teams.

Students' verbal and nonverbal behaviour was observed during the course in order to be able to analyse whether their skills in intercultural communication would change. Video-recording was utilised in data collection. Without it the observation would have been impossible. Without some predetermined structure and knowledge of the relevant theoretical works the analysis would have been rather unsound. Still, if applying fully predetermined structure our study would have missed e.g. how the two small incidents changed behaviour in the Royal Chips team. In the future the collected data allows us to analyse more in detail what kind of critical incidents there are in intercultural student team communication and how they influence on student's behaviour.

Verbal behaviour was mainly analysed in the light of three tasks – idea originally presented by McGrath (1991) – and that seemed to work well. Analysing non-verbal behaviour was very challenging but by concentrating only on few issues it was manageable. It was particularly interesting to notice the difference in teams' behaviours with respect to laughing. The role of humour and laughing in improving learning results

would need more attention, but at least former studies indicate that there would be positive correlation between them (e.g. Miller, 1996). In the future one could e.g. analyse talkativeness (counting words and the silent time) and responsiveness (analysing initiation and response in communication). The study by Wang et al (2009) indicates that these tend to change along the time spent working in an intercultural team.

It was also noted that even though the more heterogeneous team seemed not to communicate as openly as the more homogeneous team, in the end both teams were equally successful. This is in line with previous studies indicating that along time heterogeneous teams become effective. This notion also justifies the utilisation of longitudinal approach when studying multicultural teams. Snap-shot from the beginning or from the end of the course may easily lead to fallacious results.

The results indicated that students' behavior did not significantly change by attending the course. When estimating the influence of one course, we need to acknowledge that nowadays the university students, especially in Europe, tend to have acquired rather vast amount of experiences with foreign cultures. Many of them have great deal of travel experience and friends around the globe. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009) Thus, it can be assumed that especially the awareness and sensitivity components of ICCs of the students are already rather high.

The study had various limitations. Although there exists agreeable critics of Hofstede's work as for start we were focusing on national background only, which of course offered a very simplistic picture of cultural differences. Now we have basically analysed types of verbal and nonverbal behaviour separately. However, our data enables us to see how different types of behaviours (e.g. verbal comments, smiles, laughs and eye

contacts) are linked together, i.e. analyse more carefully the process, not only content (cf. Pettigrew, 1992). For such deeper analysis we would go beyond of what the students do (identify action) and how do they do (structure and mechanisms. We could more systematically apply a second proof procedure of considering ‘what is done next?’ and ‘what institutional context or ends are being indexed and advanced and how?’. This would enhance our understanding not only on student learning but also on intercultural communication in teams.

The reflexive potential of video has not been mobilized to investigate real time communication at this phase of the study. We believe that the visual reflexive and interventionist technique (cf. Carroll et al., 2008) into students learning cultural competence in class maybe important as it would enable to hybridize descriptive analytical and prescriptive approaches. Learning the subject content in multicultural teams and at the same time increase cultural competence depends on integrated, reflexive and flexible communication practices between student-student and student-instructor. Video assisted research is one of important means to prepare the instructors for these challenges and provide learning material for the students.

Further research on ICC development is clearly needed since in the future multicultural classrooms are becoming more common and at the same time the quest for ICCs is increasing in the societies.

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