

SVETIMUJU KALBU STUDIJOS/ STUDIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Cross-cultural Differences and Stereotypes: a Challenge for European Project Success

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Abstract. Developing a research project that involves more countries and several scientific approaches requires a huge effort to find a common way to communicate and to get over stereotypes and schemas. The experience we are sharing through the QiS (Quality in school) project involves 7 countries in Europe and has given us the opportunity to analyse in which way our co-operation has been developing through mutual acquaintance (using meetings, videoconferencing and E-mails) and deconstruction of stereotypes. Thus, the paper is a case study of the development of one project culture of a multitude of background cultures – a story of both team development throughout different stages and of culture development. The data has been collected through direct observation of the modification in communication style and through a semi-structured questionnaire in which every participant of the project has described her / his perception of the foreigners before and after the deeper acquaintance and some situations in which they have noted cultural differences or misunderstandings due to cross-cultural communication. The findings are interpreted through the academic culture typologies of Becher and especially the national culture traits of Hofstede for eventual generalizability.

Introduction

The idea to develop a research in the cross-cultural field among EC researchers was born during a research project called QiS, funding by EC-Socrates-Comenius 2.1. QiS involves actually 18 partners from seven current and forthcoming EC Countries (Italy, Finland, France, Germany, Denmark, Lithuania and Slovenia). In the project the partners have two different types of status, research partners (RP) and school partners (SP). The former cooperate at international level to develop tools, the latter receive training and actions at a local level, even if all the participants are involved in sharing opinion and attending the meetings.

QiS started in October 2003. Contacts among the first RP had been started more than a year before, during the planning phase; consequently, communication processes were already started, even if only by virtual tools, almost a year before the first real meeting. In different ways, every partner had created into his / her mind an idea of each other partner before learning to know him / her in person. Since the first contacts among partners we understood the relevant role of cultural differences, especially in communication and decision making style.

Our hypotheses are based on our experiences in the project QiS. We try to demonstrate with this article how a common aim among people from different cultures could be the mean to develop a better idea of the foreign people and how the natural differences among them could become a way to enrich the project and not obstacles to go through. The aim of the present study is to understand and illustrate how the individual schema of people that are foreign to

each other (prototype or stereotype) could influence cross-cultural interaction and how the reciprocal development of knowledge of the others' real nature through meetings and work-groups can modify them.

Theoretical Frameworks

Cultures and Nationalities

The rationale behind the psychological cultural studies is the argument that behaviour can be better understood by analysing the context of the culture in which it occurs.

The culture of a country, as Hofstede defines,

"is not a combination of properties of the "average citizen", or a "modal personality". It is, among other things, a set of likely reactions of citizens with a common mental programming" (1991:112).

Cultural values live on an subconscious level, they have been learned in since the first years of our life (in the case of a national culture), their validity cannot be easily discussed due to their being subconscious, and they can only be inferred from the actual observed behaviour of people. These traits of observable behaviour include the ways of greeting, eating, showing emotions, keeping distance, touching, body hygiene, and so on. The sense in studying culture and cross-cultural differences lies in the influences of the behaviour and prior expectations. A deep knowledge of their meaning help people to a better understanding of each others' shared values and help thus cross-cultural groups to oversee the differences and concentrate on the common aim.

Literature about cross-cultural influence and stereotypes is very large and covers more than one scientific field (from anthropology to sociology, from social psychology to political sciences). Without forgetting the main contribute that some authors (i.e. Inglehart, 1977; 1988; Frederking, 2004 and King et al, 2004) have given to this topic we are going to take in account, for this article, mainly psychological and anthropological literature.

In psychological cross-cultural literature there are several studies in which the European culture is compared with other cultures (Asian, American); there are less studies into European context that analyse differences and prototypical schemas among European countries. One of the most comprehensive and interesting reviews is about Ronen and Shenkar (1985) in which 5 European cultural clusters have been identified:

- Anglo cluster: Ireland, United Kingdom;
- Nordic cluster: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden;
- Germanic cluster: Austria, Germany, Switzerland;
- Latin cluster: Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France;
- Near East cluster: Greece, Turkey.

The authors indicate that countries in the same cluster are kept culturally closer to each other by geographical proximity, common language, language group, religion, economic development, political, educational and social development. All these elements help the countries within the cluster to at least in some degree share the common values that influence culture.

A new field in cross-cultural differences refers to leadership perception among cultures. At international level, the GLOBE project (House et al., 1999) has highlighted how there are both universal and contingent indicators in leadership perception. The GLOBE European results have been reported by Brodbeck et al. (2000) and they delineated six differing clusters referring to leadership categorization. The main difference with the Ronen & Shenkar clustering is in sharing the Near East cluster in two: Central and Near East. In the Central cluster Brodbeck et al. list are Slovenia and Poland, whereas in Near East cluster we find Greece, Turkey and Russia. Besides, France is in the GLOBE study not seen to be a part of the Latin cluster.

These results help us in understanding differences in the 7 countries involved in QoS, there are: Finland and Denmark (part of Nordic cluster), Germany (part of Germanic cluster), Italy (Latin cluster), Slovenia (Central cluster), Lithuania (proxy by Russia in Near East cluster) and France (out of cluster by Brodbeck et al., into Latin cluster by Ronen and Shenkar). The main problem in comparing the QoS project with earlier culture research is finding research considering the specific features of the Lithuanian culture; in fact, the Lithuanians consider themselves culturally quite different from Russians (Baskaukas, 1981; Gay, 2001), even if they have been included in this cluster in most of the studies referred to above.

Referring to the studied dimensions of cultures in cross-cultural research, one of the most important is by Hofstede (1984, 1991). He has isolated four main dimensions along which the cultures differ from each other:

- Power distance (PD): the emotional distance between bosses and subordinates, describing the expectation and acceptance level between persons with different power status.
 - Small: interdependence and consultative leadership style; possibility of disagreement with bosses; independent behaviour is encouraged in children education, more autonomy; equality; acceptance of responsibility.
 - Large: dependence, disagreement not accepted, remissive; different social classes, children obedient with parents (respect), no autonomy; hierarchy, status symbol importance; discipline.
- Individualism versus collectivism (IC): the way to consider person as part of a bigger common group or as an individual among other individuals; in the former there is more integration, cohesion into group, in the latter everyone is expected to look after him / herself.
 - *Individualism*: direct communication (no / yes), direct feedback, personnel opinion; silence is abnormal; low context communication (Hall, 1976 in Hofstede): explanation of obvious; Intrinsic motivation; guilty feeling as consciousness; self achievement needs; employee commitment.
 - *Collectivism*: different meaning in 'yes'; silence is more accepted (not compulsory talking); high context communication (Hall, 1976 in Hofstede); sons will follow parents occupation; maintenance of harmony; extrinsic motivation; shame value as collective obligation; success needs; easy mobility.
- Masculinity versus Femininity (MF): a way to privilege assertiveness as opposed to preferring modesty and tenderness; in the former culture the gender roles are quite different, in latter one this difference is not so marked.
 - *Masculinity*: must excel to be appreciated, admiration of the strong, doesn't accept failure (even up to suicide requirement for the unsuccessful); live in order to work; competition and performance; conflict solving by fighting; less permissive.
 - *Femininity*: non ambitious and modest, sympathy for the weak; social skills are developed; work in order to live; cooperation and solidarity; conflict by negotiation; more permissive / tolerant;
- Uncertainty avoidance (UA): the way of handling uncertainty, the feeling of more or less anxiety toward the uncertainty.
 - “*The extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations*” (Hofstede, 1991:113).
 - About implication in communicative style, the more anxious cultures (high uncertainty avoidance index) seem to be the more expressive ones: talking with hands, raising one's voice, showing emotions; people seem to be busy, fidgety and aggressive. “*What is different is dangerous*”. Disagreement is a

way to break a friendship. Precision is required and rule-work and procedures are developed to keep it up.

- In cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, emotions should not be shown, stress should be internalized; they give the impression to be quiet, easy going, indolent, and even lazy. "What is different is curious". Disagreement in opinion is not a reason to conflict between friends. Basic innovation is everybody's right.

The Concepts of Schema, Prototype and Stereotype

The process of categorization helps people in reducing complexity of the external world by organizing the information that comes from stimuli into a smaller number of labels which help in understanding and communication (Cantor & Mischel, 1979). This categorization involves the classification of similar stimuli into groups based on their likeness. Rosch (1978) holds that when there is not a clear-cut boundary in stimuli, people use abstract categorizations learned and transmitted through culture instead of depending on "real" observed characteristics. This kind of learned categorizations are called schemas.

Categorization also produces expectations; consequently, if we meet a prototype for people connected to a country, sharing a culture different to ours, we are bound to believe that he / she will be similar to our schema. This "typical" expectation is called a stereotype of that group of people. Stereotyping occurs when assumptions about collective properties of a group are applied to a single member of the group; even if stereotypes might be half-truths, they are not the correct ground on which to judge people (Hofstede, 1981).

Empirical studies about social influence have shown the importance of social shared beliefs on the structure of personal beliefs (Moscovici, 1976, Turner, 1991); stereotypes, seen as abstract representations of out-groups, are not immune to this kind of process (Strangor, Sechrist and Jost, 2001): these studies demonstrate that social influence determinates processes through which stereotypical beliefs become shared beliefs.

If the individual we meet turns out to be different, our expectation will not be fulfilled, but this does not automatically mean that we are going to be disappointed about him / her, even if we will be surprised to note that he / she is different.

Indeed, one of the critical points in struggling with our schemas is *the fundamental attribution error* (Heider, 1958; Ross, 1977). When someone has to admit that a foreign person he / she learns to know contradicts with his / her stereotype for that culture or nation, he / she often tries to justify it by saying that this person is somehow special compared to the culture he / she is from – he / she is different from the people of his / her country – so that the stereotype can survive (Wilder, 1984). This attribution error is even more difficult to face when people is emotionally involved in defending his / her schema (prejudice) and thus every logic reasoning is going to fail (Allport, 1954). When a person is not emotionally involved it can be

easier to recognise the error and to redefine the stereotypes, because we can use more efficiently the controlled processing in analysing information. This is well demonstrated in Devine's theory (1989); conscious processing is often stopped by distraction, stress, or less attention, meanwhile the automatic processing will pop up and will not be suppressed in these cases.

The *Illusory correlation phenomena* help us in maintaining our schemas (Chapman, 1967): when we expect two things are related we fool ourselves into believing that they are, moreover we recognise around us a lot of proof that they are, and thus we tend to ignore proof of the opposite (Kunda, Oleson, 1995; Ytzerby, Coull and Rocher, 1999).

Then *in-group bias* occurs when we have positive feelings and offer special treatment for people we have defined as being part of the group and reserve negative feelings and unfair treatment for others simply because we have defined them as being in the out-group (Aronson et al., 1997). When the in-group is composed of our compatriots, we are actually conducting cultural discrimination. The other side of in-group bias is the *out-group homogeneity* (Quattrone, 1986) that explains why we are not able to identify differences among people that belong to the out-group (i.e. "the Chinese appear all alike for a foreigner").

Researchers demonstrate that a correct strategy against the negative effects of stereotyping should include:

1. interpersonal contact: to put different persons together (Sherif, 1961);
2. creating mutually interdependence and a common aim (Amir, 1969);
3. equal status among members (Pettigrew, 1969);
4. informal interaction (Brewer & Miller, 1984);
5. multiple contacts: extending the *exception known* to the out-group (Wilder, 1984);
6. social norms to promote equality, tolerance and acceptance (Cook, 1984).

To our opinion, European cooperation in research projects should face all the items listed above in trying to reduce the problems of stereotyping:

1. Researchers from different countries work together in a group. It is possible that someone have stereotypical assumptions about another country, and they also have schemas and prototypical models that produce expectations. Within a project, they meet each other, they communicate by mails and phone, video-conferencing: consequentially they find a space (virtual and / or real) to communicate.
2. They share a common aim (that is, the project aim) and they should work together to realise it. There should not be too strong competition between the members, and they have take care to create conditions for interdependence and not for too individual work; consequentially a good group climate should be realised;
3. A different role exists in the leader status and it has a different position from the others, but the leader of a

project has only a limited power and it is more a coordinator than a "boss".

4. While working together there are a lot of situations in which informal communication forms are used. It is not possible to remain strictly formal in a meeting and it is not even required for the efficiency of the project work. What is more, after the job-meeting there are ways to meet each other out of the formal role, during dinner or evening programme or sightseeing the city where the meeting is located. A lot of informal communication takes place through the correspondence and e-mails, too (with smiles, regards and sharing events within or outside of the project).
5. There is the possibility to extend the knowledge outside the project partnership to other foreign people, for example during the meeting in different countries or visiting the partner organisation for a period.
6. The main norm system that supports these actions is anyway all the time based in European Union project aim; by funding international projects the EU promotes mutual knowledge and gives the possibility to reduce cultural stereotyping. The increased understanding of the other project partners' cultures and languages is also often an evaluation point in the EU project evaluation guidelines.

The Aim and Research Questions of the Study

As we have already reported, when people are unsure about the nature of the social world, they use their schemas to fill in the gaps. In the QiS experience, when we were going to meet partners (unknown people) we tried to find more information about them and we have used our prototype based on the information gathered to reduce our emotional stress before the meetings. Just before our first meeting we could speculate about the other participants without knowing them, using only some pieces of summary information; firstly, the common aim in participating to the project and to the meeting, then a common knowledge base referring to our academic background, but not least the idea of the different countries from where we arrive. The activated schemas have automatically influenced our actions and our communication together our current opinion about the others.

- In this brief study, we firstly want to inquire if the QiS Project respects the six points discussed above in reducing stereotyping.
- Then, another point to investigate is the development of the prototype that partners have about the other countries / partners after the first moments of the project, after the first two physical meetings and 5 months of cooperation. We assume that the current schema should not include many negative patterns if the stereotyping has been reduced. Our hypothesis is that our perception of the other partner's country should be less affected by stereotypes now, because of sharing a research project experience.
- As the participants in the meetings have been almost the same individuals all the time, we should be able to inquire if the fundamental attribution error is used to justify differences among the partners and their

nationalities. If this is seen to be the case, we should probably study a way to include more persons from each nationality.

- Finally, we want to understand which are the attributes associated to a participant countries' people, trying to make a comparison with Hofstede categorization of cultures and comparing with the self-perception of the partners.

Method

It is quite difficult to understand in one point of time what has happened in our minds during these five months, so it's not the aim of this study either. What we can do, without longitudinal surveys, is to attempt a deep analysis of what happened by three internal observers, the authors of the present paper, following the main theories about stereotypes.

To answer the first question of attempt to follow the six points to reduce stereotyping, we have thought back to QiS phases finding out the mechanisms through we have facilitated or interfered with this process. The comments and opinions have been discussed among the authors.

To inquire the partner's schemas about the others we have created a brief questionnaire in which we asked to itemise labels given to the foreign nationalities. This same questionnaire has been submitted to a sample of 40 Italian students to analyse differences in stereotyping. With the aim to discover whether a fundamental attribution error has developed within the team, we asked in the questionnaire if they recognise their foreign partners (individuals) in the chosen labels (of the nationalities), if the participation in the project has changed their idea of the other countries and the reason for this eventual change.

Finally we have conducted role-playing experiments with the students to re-organise the labels into schemas and to define clusters of our project countries, in order to be able to compare with the categorization suggested by Hofstede.

We have submitted the questionnaire to all the participants that have participated in QiS meetings (both real and virtual) via E-mail, asking to send it back within 7 days. The number of questionnaires thus was 22, of which only 15 were returned (after 2 weeks). Someone forgot to fill in, but in a few cases (3) the persons have declared their embarrassment in filling in it. For comparison, we have chosen 2 classrooms of students in Social Psychology and Work Psychology courses, 40 students (30 responded). One of the main problems in comparing different samples is the cultural level of the subjects (even different educational / scientific backgrounds can change the culture perceptions a lot; Becher, 1989). Because it was very difficult to find in a short time a similar sample (university researchers and teachers of varying academic "tribes"), we decided to include students with a basic knowledge in stereotype theory and hope that this insight would help to reduce the differences between the two samples. The QiS respondents are 10 male and 5 female, with the age ranging between 26 and 64. Ten of the respondents have already earlier taken part in European projects; what is more, almost all (except three) know more than 5 people in each of the involved countries.

Results

Stereotypes among the Project Partners

To inquire the level of stereotyping in partner's questionnaires we simply calculated the number of negative labels used to describe foreign people; then we have compared this indicator with the same results in the student sample. To decide as unanimously as possible which labels have a negative value we made a focus group between two different cultures: Italian and Finnish. As is well known, the two countries are in opposite part of Europe, the former in the South, the latter in the North and researchers from different fields (anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists) agree to the fact they

have very few characteristics to share. It is maybe sufficient to compare some popular books (e.g. Paasilinna and Mizzau) to understand the deep differences in these cultures; as far as possible within Europe, these differences also show in studies such as those by Trompenaars and Hofstede. With this method we avoided a choice of labels influenced by a cultural bias, consequently we could chosen as negative label an adjective that has a negative value only for that specific culture (i.e. "noisy" could be negative for Finnish and quite normal for Italian, as "cold" could be negative for Italian and quite normal for Finnish). So, we maintained as negative labels only the ones chosen as negative from these two cultures' representatives (Table 1).

Table 1. The agreed-upon list of negative labels.

NEGATIVE LABELS					
bad dressing	chaotic	fat	intrusive	not gassy	strict
bear	conceited	haughty	laid-back	obstinate	strong nationalist
bit stubborn	depressed	heavy drinkers	low-worker	pedant	
boring	disorganized		messy	sad	too silent
bossy	distrustful	hidebound	militarist	skittish	unreliable

Then we compared the results with the labels chosen by the student sample to verify if the amount of negative labels would be higher than or similar to the European researcher sample. As shown in Table 2, all countries but one have a higher percentage of negative labels in the student sample than among the EU project partners. Only the French received the a worse judgement by the EU partners (25.5%, against 20% by the students), but the reason could be found in a better evaluation by the students (the lowest among all the countries) and not in a more negative evaluation by the project partners. Slovenia received the highest percentage of negative labels by students and the reason here could be the proximity between Italy and Slovenia (students from Trieste University).

These results show that the project partners had less negative stereotypical thought connected to the other nationalities than the students in the composed reference group. This general result is not to remain undiscussed; the samples are quite small, and the results of Becher (1989) suggest that sociologists are the most critical of all the academic disciplines towards the others. On the other hand, it is generally believed that young persons have *more extreme position* towards foreigners than older persons. We will try to confirm these results further in some way.

Table 2. number of negative labels attached to the partner countries.

	GERMANY		DENMARK		FINLAND		ITALY		LITHUANIA		SLOVENIA		FRANCE		TOTAL	
	EU	students	EU	students	EU	students	EU	students	EU	students	EU	students	EU	students	EU	students
Total labels	43	55	49	25	45	32	39	33	18	9	30	23	47	50	271	227
negative labels	8	17	4	8	11	8	9	8	5	3	4	18	12	10	53	72
%	18,60	30,91	8,16	32,00	24,44	25,00	23,08	24,24	27,78	33,33	13,33	78,26	25,53	20,00	19,56	31,72

Fundamental Attribution Error

One of the questions asked was whether the reason to the noted differences between prototypical schema and QiS

Maybe *simply* having to agree in an European project directs people to be more open to the foreigners, to use less stereotyping. The cognitive dissonance theory explains this phenomenon about distorting our preferences after a decision (i.e. Brehm, 1956). If the decision is "I take part in an European Project cooperation", cognitions about any negative aspects related to the cooperation (i.e. any stereotypes) are dissonant with the decision and the arguments behind it; to reduce dissonance people change their way to feel about it, using less negative stereotyping.

Alternatively, Bem's theory of self-perception (1967) could explain this from a behaviourist viewpoint. If we describe ourselves analysing our own behaviour, then we are more disposed to assume we are not influenced by stereotyping and, finally, don't use them, if we observe ourselves as partners in an European Project. In our research, focusing the attention of the respondents in their being European partners and that they use stereotypes could have generated both a need to reduce cognitive dissonance, and a behaviour that is coherent with their own self-perception as European project partners (or "Europeans", if the partners want to see themselves like that in this context).

participant profile is to be found in the opinion that QiS partners are somehow special cases for their nationalities. Through this question we can understand if fundamental attribution error takes place to correct their own prototypical

schema of foreigners. With this "special case" justification people can maintain their idea about the stereotype even admitting that the people they have met are different from this schema. We cannot demonstrate that QiS partners are not special people, and we strongly believe that everyone is special anyway; we only assume that they are not completely different from their average ideal-typical nationalities, above all because we have met more than one person from that country.

We counted six answers in which the justification from different perception was because of QiS special partners. It is not the majority of the sample but these six are all but one of who answered that they had gained a better idea of countries involved since having met the project partners. In fact, in an earlier question we asked if the QiS project had changed the idea of the involved countries. Six persons answered it to now be better for each country, 2 answered it is now different (nor better or worst), 2 that is better for someone and worse for others and 5 did not perceive any change in their opinion on the nationalities. Only in one of these answered that the reason for a different perception was perceived to be in an incorrect schema.

If fundamental attribution error is so widespread, it means that QiS has not yet reached the fifth point of "reducing stereotyping" strategy. This too is a finding to analyse further. There are only one or two partners from each country, and we do not have any sensible way to extend the sample. Until this moment, we have had only two real meetings and in neither have we had a good possibility to gain acquaintances besides the project partners. We believe that the three years in which the project is going to be realised will give us the possibility to create situations in which our sample of foreigners will grow, consequentially helping us to correct our stereotypes.

The National Traits: a Comparison with the Hofstede Clusters

Through an analysis of the Hofstede dimensions we can summarize that:

- German people should be punctual (Lawrence, 1980 *in* Hofstede, 1990), structured (Stevens, 1970 *in* Hofstede, 1990), show a small power distance, be individualist and show proof of a masculine value set.
- French people should be intriguing (d'Iribarne, 1989 *in* Hofstede, 1990); bureaucratic (Crozier 1964, *in* Hofstede, 1990); be "pyramid people" in organizations (Stevens, 1970, *in* Hofstede, 1990), have a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, large power distance, and individualist values.
- Italian people should show a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, be individualistic and have a masculine value set.
- Denmark should have a low uncertain avoidance degree, small power distance, be individualistic and have a feminine value set.
- Finland should have small power distance, people should be individualists and show a feminine value set.
- Slovenia (proxied here by Yugoslavia) should have a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, collectivism and a feminine value set.

It is easy to see that there are some analogies and some differences between the six countries. We are sorry not to be able to say anything *ex ante* on the Lithuanian culture¹ as it was not included in the Hofstede study (and the Soviet Union culture listed in some contemporary studies is not a good proxy because Lithuania was such a small part in it).

In Hofstede's study, some of our partner countries clearly should differ culturally from the others:

- Denmark is the only one with a low uncertain avoidance, thus it should give as consequence that Danish do not find it easy in showing emotion, nor stress, they prefer to be quiet, easy going, indolent, maybe even lazy. Their typical organisation should be as a village market, focused on communication.
- Yugoslavia is the only one culture in which collectivism is higher than individualism. In practice, this means at least a different communication sense making (saying 'yes' just to be respectful) but also maybe long discussions before decision-making.
- Germany is the only one in which small power distance and masculine value stay together, which should mean very different role between male and female in behaviour, even if not necessarily in status;
- Italy is the only one in which large power distance exists together with masculine value. That means strong differences between male and female role, especially in social status.

There are more similarities in these countries in the Hofstede study in:

- France and Italy share large power distance and individualism, whereas Germany, Denmark and Finland share low power and individualism;
- Finland, Germany, Italy and France share high uncertainty avoidance degree and individualism;
- Denmark and Finland share small power distance coinciding with individualist and feminine values;
- France and Yugoslavia share large power distance and a feminine value set (ambiguity in male / female role);
- Italy and Germany on the other hand are individualist and masculine;
- Italy, France and Yugoslavia have high uncertainty avoidance and large power distance, which should justify hierarchy in organisations;
- Finland and Germany have high uncertainty avoidance and small power distance, which should make organisations to put more attention in structure and topical issues than people.

Results from labelling foreign countries by partners and student sample in some places coincide, in some places conflict with these earlier findings. Naturally also Hofstede's findings are criticized, especially the labeling of the dimension masculine / feminine, but it anyway remains the largest study of its type. In the following, we discuss our findings of the QiS partner nations country by country.

¹ The only indication we found in Hofstede is about Russian status of women that justified, for the author, a feminine Russian culture.

GERMANY

The class of labels with the biggest frequency is the Structured-Reliable category, both in the European and the student sample, and this seems coherent with the self-perception of the German partners, too.

We have grouped under this label adjectives as: *disciplined, hierarchic, orderly, organised, strict, structured, disciplined, obedient, punctual, reliable, serious, polite*. We have found no incongruence in the subject opinion. This seems to be in line with Steven's idea of Germany (structured) and it is congruent also with an high uncertain avoidance degree added to small power distance (Hofstede).

German people have been classified as hard workers (7), poor communicators (7) and proud-nationalist (4), too, both by the Italian students and by the European partners, but the German partners themselves don't focus their attention on this dimension.

DENMARK

The clearly central dimension for the Danish people seems to be the Communication (15), even if there is some paradox in the labels used: the European partners judge Danish as *friendly, sunny, sharing, helpful, and open* (10 labels) but also *cold, bear, quiet and reserved* (5). The Italian student sample agreed with the poor communication abilities of the Danish, while the self-perception of the Danish partners is closer to the positive side (*trustworthy* and *open*). The Hofstede results suggest that the Danish should not have it easy to show emotion, and they are quiet, but on the other side they give big importance in organisational communication: this could explain the apparent contradiction in labelling.

The second dimension attributed to the Danish is linked to Cultural and Creative aspects: *liberal, cultural, peace-loving, philosophic, no extremes* (7) and more *good designers, creative, intelligent, strange* (4); not as detailed, but in agreement with the opinion of students, were the comments from Danish partner. These characteristics are in correspondence to a low uncertainty avoidance degree, in which culture type people should be open to different ideas and basic innovators.

FINLAND

The Finnish are firstly poor in Communication (14), adjectives used are *closed, cold, silent, quiet, and calm*. The Finnish partner seems to be aware of this as he describes his people as *quiet*. This perception justifies some labels in the trait characteristics due to implicit theories (Rosenberg et al., 1968), such as: *sad, depressed and shy*. It is also coherent with the individualism dimension by Hofstede that involves direct communication but not with an high score in uncertainty avoidance (that the Finnish obtained) that should involve a communicative style.

The Finnish have also been considered as Reliable and Structured (9) and hard workers (3) both among the European partners, and by the students and it seems to be the opinion of the Finnish respondent, too (*rational, strict, honest*). The Finnish and German peoples have been described to be similar in this dimension, which is coherent

with the Hofstede report in which an high uncertain avoidance is linked to a small power distance.

The Danish and Finnish share a feminine culture, small power distance and individualism. This should be shown by permissive and tolerant behaviour, autonomy and self-achievement needs. The similarity between the two countries in our study, however, is the Creativity dimension (*good designers, creative, intelligent, open minded, eclectic, off-putting*) that explains only in part the mentioned Hofstede categorization.

FRANCE

The French description is typified by terms Proud-Nationalist (14) and Communication (12). In the former, we find *nationalist, proud, conceited, ambitious, hedonistic, and pedant*, which seem to correspond with the self-perception of the French partners who use the *arrogant* label. In the latter we find *emotional, communicative, nice, open, eloquent, friendly*, but also *unhospitable* and *closed*. Related to this dimension, some labels have been chosen to indicate the Joyful dimension (3) that is strongly perceived by the French partners (3): *savoir – vivre, enjoy life, happy, joyful*.

Others not marginal dimension also seem to describe the French, for example Culture (3), Food (4) and Fashion / style (2); in particular the cultural labels were often used in their self-perception description.

The whole profile is not so far from the *intriguing* label given by d'Iribarne (1989, in Hofstede). Conversely, we don't find a strong relation with bureaucracy and "pyramid people" that Hofstede indicated: the few labels we have referring to organisation and structure are conflicting (*formal, polite, disorganised, unreliable*).

ITALY

The ones that received the absolutely worst opinions in Structured-Reliability type are the Italians (12) and it seems that this opinion is quite known by the Italian partners (5), though less by the Italian students. Connected to this opinion is also the Hard worker type score (3 negative). Communicative class contains 6 preferences, linked to Joyful type (5) in which also Italian partners seem to recognise themselves. Another important dimension is Creativity (5), also in self-perception. What seems to be only a self-perceived idea is about the Family / local society centeredness, words such as *mummy* and *mafia* used by Italians (both partners and students) to describe their Italian stereotype. The only correlation we found with the Hofstede study is in the high uncertain avoidance level that involves showing emotions, and a generally communicative style. In total, the Italian is as communicative and Joyful as French, as Creative as the Danish and Finnish, but they are also characterised by disorganisation.

SLOVENIA

There are not many labels given to describe Slovenian. It seems they are a bit unknown to the European partners. On the other side, they are well-known for the student sample because they live at the border.

The strongest dimension is Proud-Nationalist (9), followed by Structured-Reliable (6) and Communicative (6). These traits seem not to be perceived by the Slovenian partners, who indicate quite different labels to describe their Slovenian stereotype, while they are similar enough to students' opinions. The main difference is that the students used more depreciatory labels to describe them. We interpreted that the reason lies in the proximity between Trieste, their home town, and Slovenia.

Of the Hofstede dimensions, Slovenia is the only country in which we found the collectivism value that should cause a high communicative context as it is founded in Communicative dimension. The Slovenians share with the French a high score in Proud-Nationalist, with Finland, Denmark and Germany a high Structured-Reliability, and with Denmark, France and Italy a good Communication style.

LITHUANIA

We have received only very few labels for the Lithuanians. They seem to be really unknown to European partners and

Table 3. Means and standard deviations related to the six measured dimensions in the seven countries.

	N	Talking		Moving		Touching		Formality		Structuring		Working	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
DENMARK	14	3,31	1,21	3,53	0,78	4,21	0,73	2,94	1,22	2,71	1,09	2,15	0,65
FINLAND	13	4,15	1,07	4,00	0,82	4,08	0,80	2,08	0,97	2,31	0,63	3,18	0,69
FRANCE	11	2,18	0,87	1,73	0,74	2,00	0,92	3,00	0,95	3,00	1,60	3,50	0,87
GERMANY	13	3,31	0,48	3,46	0,45	4,00	0,65	2,15	1,23	2,00	0,58	1,69	0,63
ITALY	10	1,40	0,51	1,40	0,73	2,20	0,88	3,80	0,63	3,20	1,42	2,89	1,51
LITHUANIA	8	3,50	0,93	3,25	0,76	3,13	0,98	2,63	0,58	2,75	0,89	2,63	0,92
SLOVENIA	9	2,33	0,87	2,44	0,73	3,44	0,53	2,89	0,78	2,33	0,87	2,88	1,05

Table 3 shows the results of the evaluation of European partners over the six dimensions: talking, moving, touching, formality, structuring and working (Remland et al., 1995). The range of answers was from 1= *too much* to 5 = *too little*, intermediate value = *enough*.

All the values less than 3 mean that this dimension has been evaluated as evident; the closer the value is to 1, the stronger the dimension is felt. All the values above 3 mean that the dimension is weak, the more when the value is closer to 5. The standard deviation (SD) gives the measure of the dispersion of the single evaluations around the mean: the higher the SD is, the more heterogeneous are the single answers, while a standard deviation close to 0 means that the Mean is a very good indicator and that the respondents all agree in around that value.

On this basis we can observe that Talking has the smallest mean value for Italians, with a little SD, which means the Italians have been perceived as big talkers, the value of the typical answer being between "talk much" (2) and "talk too much" (1). France and Slovenia are above the mean in this dimension, between much (2) and right enough (3). Finland has the maximum value, upper 4 (even with a quite large

to Italian students, too. Some labels are indeed contradictory, specially in Communication (4 positive, 2 negative). The common idea of the Lithuanians mostly seems to be related to Proud-Nationalist (4) and Structured-Organisation (3). What is interesting to know is that Lithuanian partners' own opinion concentrated in the Communication dimension even if a bit discordant, too (7 positive, 2 negative).

A brief consideration about the fact that both Lithuania and Slovenia received the shortest list of labels could be done about their similar status in being earlier out of the European cooperation, and maybe mainly because they are relatively new independent countries. Lithuania has been separated from Soviet Union and Slovenia from Yugoslavia, but it seems that the persons who answered the questionnaire has not used this proxy to identify the two countries. It could also be that the used inference was that they are not part of the old countries that the respondents knew, so they were somehow different and the respondents could not describe them because they are not yet part of Europe as the respondents have known it.

SD), which means a range between "enough" (3) and "too little Talking".

Similar situation could be observed in Movements. The Italians and French move too much or much, Slovenians move a lot while the Finnish move only a little. This "movement" is about body language, moving the hands and body while communicating, which is important especially in videoconferencing and other virtual meetings. The Touching dimension refers to the way to stay close to the others in social situations and the need to touch the other person while speaking. Only the French and Italian obtain above-neutral scores, around 2 (a lot), more for the French than for Italians. All the other countries have below-neutral scores (around 4= a little), and the highest score (4,21) has been connected to the Danish. Formality has an opposite direction: above-neutral (much / too much / neutral) for the Finnish and Lithuanians and below-neutral only for the Italians (3,8), meaning between enough and a little. Germany and Denmark have a very neutral mean but the dispersion is very high. That means heterogeneous perceptions among the respondents: someone thinks they are very formal, others think the opposite. Structuring has the same direction than Formality even if the means are all around the medium value

(3). The high standard deviation shows that there are big differences in attribution to French, Italian and Danish. The German are the hardest workers (1,61), between much and too much, while the Danish, Lithuanians, Slovenians and Italians also are between much and enough. Both Slovenians and Italians show a high standard deviation, so there are opposite judgements in the answers.

The results in these six dimensions are coherent with the qualitative analysis of the labels. What is more, in these metrics, we received more structured data that are more efficient for comparisons across countries.

The Qis Strategy to Decrease Stereotype-Induced Behaviour

Our brief experience in QiS makes us believe that it is possible to realise these six points in the facts (numbers in brackets below refer to the corresponding numbering in our original list earlier). In particular, we have learned to know each other during the meetings, by E-mail correspondence, videoconferencing and occasionally by phone (1); our common aim is to implement TQM in school organisations, and to realise it everyone knows that we have to cooperate for it. We have no perceivable internal competition, even if we have at times created some simple contests, for example to choose the logo, but it has not created rivalry. We know that the EU will finally judge our project and, if we want to obtain the final rates of the funding, we have to demonstrate that we have strictly completed what we had planned. The main risk has been in running the project individually, everyone concentrating in his / her own task. In this case no project culture would have developed. We are working to reduce this propensity, stimulating cooperation among partners (2).

Equal status within the project is not perceived in fact; the coordinator is the leader and she has to decide. Participation in decision-making seems to be not agreeable by the members, at least at this moment. Some different status is perceived among the members, too; what is good is that it is based on different experience and not on e.g. different academic position or age. We are working to discuss the differences and in improving ourselves to reduce them (3). Informal communication is used during and after the meetings with good results among almost all the partners. Informality in virtual communication (E-mail and videoconferencing) takes a quite different role: most of the contacts take place between the coordinator and individual partners, and they are of different degrees of formality; only quite rarely does a partner send a mail directly to another partner, usually only for some formal message or asking specific information. This communication does not build project culture. We attempt to improve the situation with a dedicated area of our website in which comments and suggestion could be written and read to all the partners (4). Some earlier experiences of the authors suggest, however, that even then the communication possibility is actively used by only a small part of the project people. In the two meetings we have had until now, there was the possibility to meet also other local people, even if we usually worked too much in order to make these contacts more than superficial. What we have done instead, expecting a 'cascade effect', is that every research partner brings in their local schools an European spirit and shares the experience with

the others (5). It is a way to promote the shared social norm, too, even if the major role in this work is covered by the EU (6).

Conclusion

In this study we have noticed the first steps of development of a cross-cultural team culture. It seems that it is difficult to arrive to this type of cross-cultural situations without strong stereotypical beliefs of the other nationalities, and after the first five months of work it also seems that the common psychological mechanisms work to slow down the reduction of stereotypical opinions and behaviour.

Through some empirical work we have managed to figure these stereotypes and schemas, and have recorded the fundamental attribution error with some of the partners. Because the project will continue for nearly three years, we will have a possibility to see how much the stereotypes will ultimately be reduced and how much of the ways of working of each individual member will be marked by the culture of the team QiS. The EU feels that understanding of the partner countries and their cultures are of great importance in any project. Simultaneously, the project meetings are relatively few so the resulting common culture is not supposed to be very strong. We have shown in this paper an attempt to follow the steps the research suggests to diminish stereotypes and the problems the schemas cause in teamwork. In later papers, we will report on the cross-cultural developments of the QiS.

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Sara Cervai, Tauno Kekale ir Barbara Anna Fabbro

Tarpkultūriniai skirtumai ir stereotipai: iššūkis europietiškiems projektams

Santrauka

Vykdomas tyrimas apie kultūrinius skirtumus, kurie daugiausiai atstovauja daugelio šalių atstovai, reikia daug pastangų, kad būtų rastas visiems priimtinės bendravimo būdas bei su- laužyti stereotipai ir klišės. Patirtis, kuria dalijamės Qis projekte jungia septynių Europos šalių ir suteikia mums galimybę analizuoti, kaip bendraujant (per susitikimus, vaizdo konferencijas ir el. paštu) ir laužant stereotipus vystosi mūsų bendradarbiavimas. Šis straipsnis yra vieno projekto kultūros vystymosi studija – ir komandos vystymosi skirtumose stadijose, ir kultūros vystymosi. Duomenys buvo renkami tiesiogiai stebint stiliums kitimą ir kiekvienam projekto dalyviui pateikiant pusiau struktūrizuotą klausimyną, kuriamo reikėjo pateikti savo suvokimą apie užsieniečius prieš ir po artimesnio susipažinimo bei aptarti keletą situacijų, kuriose projekto dalyviai pažymėjo kultūrinius skirtumus ar nesusipratimus dėl tarpkultūrinio bendravimo. Duomenys yra interpretuojami pagal Becher akademinių kultūros tipologiją ir ypač pagal Hofstede aptartus nacionalinės kultūros bruožus.

Straipsnis įteiktas 2004 04
Parengtas publikuoti 2004 11

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