

8 Resume

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1 Introduction

Different countries, different customs.

"All people are equal. It's just their habits that are different." (Confucius)

In the course of the increasing internationalisation and globalisation tendencies and the growing diversity of employees, the relevance of multicultural working groups in companies is rising more and more (cf. Köppel 2008, p. 2). As a result of globalisation and the opening up of new markets within and outside Europe and the establishment of branches in various countries, companies are confronted with an international workforce with whom they must automatically have an exchange relationship at all times. With the direct interaction of managers and employees from the most diverse countries, intercultural interaction and communication thus becomes more important. As a result of progress in communication technologies, virtual working groups have become an unavoidable necessity for new forms of cooperation and an integral part of most companies.

2 Theoretical background

At following chapter at first the theoretical considerations, which are the basis of this work, will be explained. Since this work is mainly concerned with virtual and intercultural communication in a transnational project, I would first like to describe a few terms in more detail in the following for a better understanding.

Virtual teams are primarily to be regarded as teams. Liebig and Schütze (2001, p. 83) understand this term "as an institutionalized group of people in an organization interacting to perform interdependent tasks, which in turn are connected by a common purpose. Katzenbach and Smith (2001) and Kleinhanns (2001) and Steinmann and Schreyögg (2005) name even more specific characteristics that identify the term team more closely. Thus, Katzenbach and Smith (2001, p. 45) attribute complementary qualities and different skills to the team members, which complement each other in terms of technical and functional expertise, cooperative problem solving and interpersonal communication. The team members also commit themselves to certain approaches in order to achieve the common project goal (cf. Kleinhanns 2001, p. 6). The characteristic of responsibility for success and failure is shared by all team members (cf. Katzenbach, p. 32). And finally, Steinmann and Schreyögg (2005, p. 593) have

the characteristics of collective performance. Teams therefore perform more collectively than the sum of their individual performances, which creates a collective, synergistic effect.

A team becomes a virtual team by the presence of the following constituent characteristics: Virtual teams work across spatial, temporal and organizational boundaries and communicate using media technology (Liebig/Schütz 2001, p. 83). As in traditional teams, the employees of a virtual project team are selected on the basis of professional, methodological and social skills (cf. Herrmann et al. 2006, p. 83). The geographical distribution of team members, be it to different office buildings at the same location or even to different countries or continents makes it impossible for the members of a project team to face each other. Therefore, they are enabled to communicate and collaborate with each other exclusively via information technologies. Spatial distance is therefore an essential feature for virtual teams (cf. Pauleen 2004, p. 11). Another factor is time. Team members can work in different time zones, which demands a higher degree of flexibility from the project teams in their joint work (see Fassnacht 2010), p. 14). The basis of a virtual team cooperation consists exclusively of information and communication systems. Electronic forms of communication include analogue media such as telephone and fax, as well as digital media such as e-mail, chats, web conference systems, etc. (see Konradt/Hertel (2002), p. 18). Although digital media also play an important role in traditional teams, they are indispensable for virtual teams. Virtual teams are understood as real project teams or working groups that are structured according to functionality and remain in place until the common goal is achieved (cf. Antoni 1998, p. 9).

Virtual teams are not in the rarest cases also international and therefore multicultural. As a result, people of different nationalities, languages and cultural backgrounds usually work together in such teams. The Dutch cultural scientist Geert Hofstede, who is one of the best-known representatives in the field of intercultural learning, shows in his model of cultural dimensions how different, for example, power relations, group dynamics, socio-cultural role distributions and interpersonal communication in the different countries are. According to Pauleen (2004, p. 14), cultural diversity can create many opportunities for successful cooperation, but it can also present some challenges.

3 Subject of the study: The SAP HCM project team of the company XY

The following sections describe the subject matter of the evaluation study. A brief description of the company is given in the first subchapter. The project is then presented.

The project, whose virtual and intercultural project communication will be examined in this work, is called SAP HCM Rollout and started with the planning and implementation in 2017.

In the course of globalization, the company XY has been facing the challenge of creating transparency and comparability within its human resource organization for some time. The difficulty lies in the different Human Capital Management (HCM) systems in use at the various international locations: The existing personnel processes have so far hardly been structured. Furthermore, manual processes, such as the creation of personnel master data, are time and resource intensive.

The implementation of a global HCM system enables the company to internationalize processes in human resources management and to create a uniform and transparent reporting (see Internal Project Presentation 2018, p. 2).

The project, which started on August 21, 2017, will run for almost one year. The aim of the project is to replace the existing HR applications for HR master data, time management, time recording and access control at the Hungarian locations with the SAP HCM system.

4 Empirical study

After the theoretical considerations on virtual communication, the following chapter presents and explains the methodological approach chosen for the empirical investigation of the research question. For a better classification, a brief overview of the different methods that exist in the research landscape is given beforehand.

Gläser and Laudel (2010, p. 24) describe empirical social research as "studies that observe a certain section of the social world in order to contribute to the further

development of theories with these observations. Through empirical, i.e. 'experiential' research processes, social reality can be observed, whereby theoretical conclusions can be drawn, guided by theories (ibid.).

Depending on the research object and objective of a study, both quantitative and qualitative research methods are applied in empirical social research.

4.1 Qualitative research

What challenges do employees of a company see in working with members of different cultures across national borders? This question is the focus of the present work. A qualitative method is therefore used for collection and evaluation.

The survey method is a guideline-based interview, which is described in more detail in chapter 4.2.1. For the analysis and evaluation I have chosen the method of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring. As in quantitative research, certain principles must also be observed for qualitative procedures.

4.1.1 Quality criteria of qualitative research

Quality criteria are considered a central component of methodological disputes. Due to the special features of the qualitative-methodical approach, the classical quality criteria of quantitative research, objectivity, reliability and validity are largely rejected in qualitative research (cf. Steinke 2010, quoted from Flick/von Kardorff/Steinke 2010, pp. 319-331). Mayring (2002, pp. 144-147, quoted from Vogt/Werner 2014, p. 69) nevertheless contains quality criteria that apply to qualitative research:

1. *Procedural documentation*: In order to ensure the traceability of the research process, all steps of the research work must be presented and justified. This includes the disclosure of the theoretical understanding as well as the description and justification of the methodical approach.
2. *Argumentative safeguarding of interpretation*: The interpretations must be secured against the material and justified by arguments and must be conclusive in themselves.

3. *Rule*: The analytical steps defined in the research design must be able to be changed in the research process. Nevertheless, a systematic procedure must be ensured when processing the material.
4. *Proximity to the subject*: qualitative research ties as closely as possible to the everyday world of the subjects being studied. Furthermore, this has the consequence that an agreement of interests with the interviewees is striven for in an equal and open relationship.
5. *Communicative validation*: Respondents are regarded exclusively as thinking subjects and not as data providers. The validity of the results should therefore be reviewed by discussing them again in dialogue with respondents.

4.1.2 Methodological principles

The success of a research process is significantly favoured by the choice of a suitable method. According to Gläser and Laudel (2010, p. 29), "certain principles form the basis of a methodology [...] which should guide the evaluation and selection of research strategies and methods. Compliance with these principles guarantees the reliability of the knowledge produced, so that other scientists can also trace the production of knowledge (cf. *ibid.*). In their explanations, Gläser and Laudel (2010, p. 30) list methodological principles that are valid not only for social science but for the whole of science. In addition to the principle of the rule-guided approach, which has already been mentioned in the Mayring quality criteria, the methodological principle of openness will be discussed in more detail below.

The principle of openness means that the empirical research process must be open to unexpected information. Researchers must not prematurely categorize observed facts under known facts, be it from theoretical analysis or from prejudices from everyday life. "In both cases, a lack of openness carries the risk that observation is pressed into pre-defined categories and the unexpected is excluded" (*ibid.*). Scientists such as Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 37), Lamnek (1988, p. 22-23) and Kleining (1982, p. 231-232) demand in their statements that "the investigation should be structured by the subject matter, i.e. by the information contained in the

empirical material" (quoted from Gläser/Laudel 2010, p. 30). The study should therefore not be structured by preliminary considerations (cf. *ibid.*).

4.2 Data collection

In the following, the procedure of the oral interview is explained by means of guideline-based interviews. First, the guide design is described, followed by the presentation of the interview partners. The interview situation is then described. This chapter concludes with a description of the analysis method.

4.2.1 Guideline-based interview

I chose the guideline-based interview as the survey method because the open design of the interview situation emphasizes the subjective view of the person interviewed more than in purely standardized questionnaires (Flick 2012, p. 194). Furthermore, I considered a guideline to be useful because I did not know the interviewees in advance and therefore there were uncertainties regarding their narrative competence (cf. Lüdders 2007, p. 67).

The interview guide thus serves to structure the course of the interview in a certain prescribed direction (cf. Bohnsack 2000, p. 22). In doing so, it has a dual role in "communicating the two conflicting requirements of structuredness and openness" (Strübing 2013, p. 92). Through maximum openness on the one hand and the possibility of intervening in the narrative strand in a structured manner on the other, the guideline design enables a reconstruction of subjective theories and everyday knowledge (cf. Helfferich 2011, p. 179). An interview guide therefore serves as a mediator between these two extremes, since it presents several relevant topics and directions for questions, "without being restrictive in the formulations of questions and above all in the sequence of topics" (Strübing 2013, p. 92).

The interview form of the guide is therefore particularly suitable for the research topic on which this work is based. The research interest is aimed at certain areas and presupposes certain thematic complexes for interpretation. Since an independent generation of the narrative design is not to be expected exclusively by the interlocutors, it is legitimate to direct the interview in a certain direction by intervening in the conversation (cf. Helfferich 2011, p. 179). I have therefore used

the guidelines of this work, which were conceived for the interviews, for orientation in all conversations, although I have changed them in part, depending on the course of the conversation.

I prepared the interview guide about two weeks before the interviews. I used various research literature on this topic, into which I had read myself in advance. Since qualitative research in its inductive approach is not based on theoretical assumptions (cf. Hussy et al. 2013, p. 191), I have tried to ask as open questions as possible and remain open to new findings. The interview was started with a given initial stimulus or with a narrative-generating initial question. Gradually more concrete questions were asked to direct research interest (cf. Lüdders 2007, p. 65). The main part of the guide covered those topics that were important for answering my research interest. Topics in the questionnaire used were the extent of cooperation with colleagues at domestic and foreign locations, the subjective assessment of the use of various communication tools, the subjective perception of linguistic and cultural challenges, the importance of personal contact and the assessment of cooperation across locations. Furthermore, the questionnaire contained control and demand questions as well as so-called maintenance questions which contributed to the continuity of the flow of discussions. At the end of the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to indicate additions or details and to complete the survey. A complete version of the guide used can be found in the Annex.

4.2.2 Selection of interview partners

The interview partners for the interviews on which the work is based were selected by the company. A prerequisite for a comprehensive analysis with regard to the challenges of virtual and intercultural cooperation was to be able to interview not only employees from Germany but also employees from Hungary and to include their point of view in my research. The respondents should be regarded as experts due to their experiences in this field.

In sociology, a multitude of expert functions emerge. This is a "social construct of expectations and attributions to the expert" (Mieg/Brunner 2001, p. 6). Sociology of science even goes so far that significant expertise is nowadays no longer produced only in science, but in almost all areas of society, for example in

companies, think tanks, NGOs, etc. (see Bogner/Littig/Menz 2014, p. 10 quoted in Mieg/Brunner (2001)). In psychology, the term expert primarily refers to the competence of the respective person. Competence is the special knowledge a person has about a certain subject and the corresponding skills which he has acquired for this purpose (cf. *ibid.*). Research findings from cognitive psychology even reinforce the statement that "experts have adapted their perception and action abilities to a certain problem area on the basis of training and many years of experience" (*ibid.*). Mieg and Brunner (*ibid.*) list the following as central elements of expert competence:

- the low importance of personal general skills (intelligence, memory, etc.) for expert performance;
- the strict range dependency of expert performance [...];
- many years of experience: A ten-year rule applies. (Acquiring expert competence takes about ten years of training and experience).

An expert is therefore "someone who has knowledge/skills specific to the field based on many years of experience" (*ibid.*).

In order to take the expert concept into account, it was therefore crucial that the three employees had already been with the company for at least ten years and had already gained experience in virtual and intercultural cooperation. I was given a male and a female person from the German side and a female interviewer from the Hungarian side for my research work.

Since the cognitive interest of this work is not in how a certain company in particular implements virtual project communication with international team members, but which advantages and challenges employees generally see from their perspective, all personal data was made anonymous. According to the Federal Data Protection Act, scientists are only permitted to publish personal data if the person concerned has given his or her consent. This provision also includes all individual details which, although not identifying a certain person in particular, could make this possible in conjunction with other data (see Gläser/Laudel 2010, p.55). Researchers are therefore subject to confidentiality and data secrecy and must also follow the "principle of informed consent" (cf. Helfferich 2011, p. 190).

For this reason, the names of my interview partners and other personal data have been made anonymous.

4.2.3 Description/ Conducting the interviews

I conducted the interviews on April 20, 2018 within the working hours of the respondents in a conference room of the company at its headquarters in Germany. Prior to this, I had already asked the HR management staff member for a room that fulfilled the criteria of an undisturbed atmosphere, good acoustics for the tape recording and the personal well-being of the interview persons (cf. Helfferich 2011, p. 177). The HR management allowed me 45 minutes for the first interview, 60 minutes for the second interview and 30 minutes for the third.

At their request, I sent them a short presentation on their thesis by e-mail in advance. The topic of my master thesis had already been communicated to them a few weeks earlier by a member of HR management. Furthermore, I have once again explicitly asked the experts in an e-mail for their consent that their statements may be used for my scientific work and inform them what happens to their statements within the research process. I have also sent the data protection agreement for scientific interviews to the interviewee in written form. It stated in writing that neither they nor their employer were mentioned by name in order to maintain anonymity. On the day of the interviews, I obtained your consent in writing from two of the three respondents to record the interview digitally using a dictation machine that I had installed on my smartphone in advance. The third interview was conducted by telephone, which is why the recording was approved orally.

4.3 Method of analysis qualitative content analysis

I chose Mayring's content analysis for the evaluation and analysis of the guide interviews conducted. A short description of the method is given in the following chapter. The analysis process is described in greater detail in Chapter 5 using the research example.

The basic idea of qualitative content analysis is the systematic analysis of texts, in which the material of data collection is processed step by step according to theory

using a category system developed from this (cf. Mayring 2002, p. 114). According to Lamnek (2005, p. 513), qualitative content analysis makes it possible to examine the "manifest communication content, i.e. statements made by respondents who consciously and explicitly express them". The intersubjectivity of the method is ensured in a strictly methodically controlled and systematized procedure. In order to enable a step-by-step and rule-based analysis of the material, it is broken down into different units. The advantages of this systematic analysis technique are used by qualitative content analysis. However, this must not lead to premature quantification. Mayring emphasizes here that the systematic and analytical steps must always be observed (cf. Mayring 2002, p. 114).

Despite the advantages listed above, qualitative content analysis also has its limits. Disadvantages may lie in a question that is too open or in inductive category formation that is to be restricted or theoretically unjustifiable (Mayring 2012, p. 474). Due to the theory-based approach of content analysis, it is particularly suitable for the research interest on which this work is based. The existing material is analyzed under a theoretically instructed question. The results are interpreted against this theoretical background (cf. Mayring 2015, p. 13).

At the centre of this analysis method is the category system developed on the material. This records those aspects that are filtered out of the existing data. This approach distinguishes qualitative content analysis from other forms of analysis, which mainly process texts interpretatively and hermeneutically (cf. Mayring 2002, p. 114). In the content-analytical interpretation process Mayring differentiates between three independent basic forms of analysis technology, namely summary, explication and structuring (cf. Mayring 2015, p. 67). According to him, the latter represents the "probably most central technique of content analysis" (ibid., p. 97). In content analysis structuring, the material is structured using a category system and text components are systematically extracted on the basis of certain criteria. The aim of the structuring-qualitative content analysis is to work out a structure from the underlying material (cf. Mayring 2002, p. 118). With regard to the research interest of the underlying work, I have chosen structuring as the primary analysis technique because of these properties. Within the structuring content analysis, Mayring (2015, p. 99)

differentiates between different forms of structuring, depending on the goal of the analysis. As structuring form of the underlying work I apply a contentwise structuring, whose goal lies in the filtering out and summary of certain topics, contents and aspects (cf. *ibid.*, p. 103).

5 Analysis and evaluation

The following sections provide analysis and evaluation. First, the coding scheme and category system is presented, with the help of which the basis for the subsequent preparation and evaluation of the data obtained is provided.

In addition, the results are summarized in a separate chapter.

5.1 Coding scheme and category system

After defining the unit of analysis and structuring dimension (see chapter 4.3), the first step in qualitative content analysis is to carefully read the text and mark important passages of the text (Kuckartz 2012, pp. 78-79). I recorded my remarks in the form of a memo. The next step is the development of thematic main and subcategories, which can largely be derived from the research question. The primary goal is to capture relevant and conspicuous text passages. In a test run, the defined category system is first checked. The category system used should comply with the basic rules. For example, the category system must be linked to the research question and the objectives of the research. Accordingly, it must neither be too slender nor too extensive. Furthermore, it should contain as detailed a description of the categories as possible. In the following third step, the entire material must be coded with the designed categories (cf. *ibid.*). Coding is the "assignment of text passages or classification of text characteristics" (Kuckartz 2010, pp. 57-58). The category denotes a label that is assigned to the relevant text passage. The category can represent a word, a word combination or a single punctuation character. Unlike quantitative methods, in which coding is computer-protected, qualitative methods are always regarded as a human interpretation (cf. *ibid.*). For this purpose, the text is checked step by step and categories are assigned to the text sections (cf. Kuckartz 2012, p. 80). By means of the theory-based structuring, the aspects mentioned in the interview on which the research

question is based can be filtered out and then classified into corresponding categories and subcategories.

The first coding process is followed by a review and refinement of the previously defined categories in the content structuring content analysis (cf. Kuckartz 2012, pp. 83-84). Within this test run, the category system will be partially revised and recast. In this rehearsal, for example, I added several categories, summarized them and defined them more precisely. This means that all text passages coded with the same category are compiled and the subcategories are determined inductively on the basis of the material (cf. *ibid.*). In a second coding process, a new, complete material flow takes place, which is based on the category system already worked out (cf. *ibid.*, p. 88). Subcategories are finally specified and expanded (see *ibid.*). I then formulated definitions and anchor examples for the categories relevant to the research questions. By means of the method used here, it is possible to determine exactly when a material component is to be classified in a respective category.

The version is the result of several material runs in which I have constantly revised the category system. I have selected the categories shown on the basis of my research interests. With regard to the selected research questions, the categories "project", "virtual project communication" and "advantages of face-to-face meetings/presence visits" are of central importance to me. The categories "project language", "challenges in cooperation" and "team spirit" will also be prepared and examined in the next chapter. In a final step, the resulting results are presented and summarized (Mayring 2015, p. 144).

5.2 Data preparation and results

The interest in knowledge is: How do binational project teams that do not work at the same location communicate successfully? What challenges do they face in their regular project work? Can a project based on purely virtual communication and collaboration lead to success at all? And do the individual team members really feel like a team despite their mostly virtual collaboration?

The answers to the research questions are provided by the statements of the interview participants in the guideline interviews conducted. The presentation of the results follows chronologically on the basis of the designed categories.

project

At the beginning of the interviews I asked the interviewees to give a short overview of the project. In the course of globalization, the company faces the challenge of creating transparency and comparability within its human resources organization, as already described in chapter 3.2. In order to implement a uniform HCM system at all locations, the central department of Human Resource Management in Germany began to introduce so-called SAP HCM systems at all domestic and foreign locations in recent years. Hungary is the last international location for these so-called rollouts.

The consequence of a uniform HCM system is that the foreign locations have to coordinate all relevant topics and processes globally and are thus more bound to the German headquarters (cf. Interview II, 0622). Both Hungarian and German employees of the company are involved in this project, with those on the German side acting as internal consultants. In addition, the team is supported by two Hungarian external SAP consultants (see Interview III, 0045-0051). The Hungarian HR manager LP describes the effects of introducing this system as a "major change" (ibid., 0025) for Hungary's central human resources department. Above all, future working methods would be significantly influenced by means of automated processes as well as closer agreements and certain specifications. The repeated statement that the introduction of HCM brings with it certain changes (ibid., 0019) and she hopes that the implementation of the system and the changes associated with it will have a positive effect in the future "[...]" (ibid., 0020), possibly implies that she still has reservations in this regard and views the change with suspicion.

Virtual project communication

The cooperation within the project team is reflected above all in the project communication. Regular agreements and the use of various virtual communication technologies are to ensure constant communication between the individual project members.

Since most of the project participants work at different locations in Hungary and Germany and the introduction of HCM in the two Hungarian plants is only part of their daily work, fixed team meetings were introduced every week (see Interview I, 0162).

For the regular project meetings, employees use WebEx meetings, a software solution that enables information to be exchanged via mobile devices and laptops. Using this online program, project members can share and collaborate on any content, such as documents, notes and recordings, via screen sharing. The WebEx program does not have a video camera, which means that team members at different locations cannot see each other. Instead, employees use the telephone during the meeting and project the respective documents onto the screen via a projector, visible to all project members in the room (cf. Interview I, 0174-0188). SI describes the extent and coordination within the project team as "[...] very (..) very intensive" (Interview II, 0038) and "very necessary" (ibid., 0039).

The WebEx meetings see SI as a good alternative to real meetings or face-to-face meetings, since by sharing documents and visualization on canvas "[...] all have the same basis, the same document [...] what is talked about" (ibid., 0145-0148). Above all, the visual component via screen makes collaboration much easier compared to a telephone call.

VO also describes this software solution as "[...] a very good story [...]" (Interview I, 0196), but notes that purely virtual communication also reaches its limits. VO sees possible reasons for faster exhaustion in the background noise and frequent technical faults (cf. ibid., 0360-0361). In addition, the interviewee generally finds telephone calls more strenuous than face-to-face meetings, which is why WebEx meetings reach the maximum limit for all participants after two hours (see 0364-0365). According to VO, metacommunication, which is not transmitted over the telephone and is therefore invisible to the interlocutors, is also a disadvantage of virtual communication.

According to SI, personal contact is nevertheless irreplaceable in a project like this (see Interview II, 0655-0656). In addition to the weekly WebEx meetings, a four- to five-day meeting of the entire project team at the main location in Hungary is an integral part (see Interview II, 0135-0139). SI cites as the main

reason for this the size of the project and the project duration, "which lasts just under a year" (ibid., 0074).

Advantages of face-to-face meetings/attendance visits

According to SI, presence visits to the Hungarian site are therefore absolutely necessary for a project to be successful. It is precisely the complexity of the individual topics or "[...] where you may (...) have to accuse someone of not having done your job [...]" (Interview II, 0409-0410), according to him, make it difficult to complete projects of this kind on a purely virtual basis (cf. ibid., 0414-0415).

LP also notes in her remarks that presence visits are an indispensable part of the project, especially with regard to linguistic misunderstandings. According to her, metacommunication contributes significantly to recognizing misunderstandings and clarifying them openly among each other.

The Hungarian HR manager describes this problem as a typical interpersonal phenomenon that cannot be traced back exclusively to communication in a foreign language for the Hungarian team members. Finally, this problem is also evident in the cooperation with their Hungarian colleagues working in the Hungarian branch. According to her, communication problems between her and her Hungarian colleagues are a challenge not to be underestimated, which would be made more difficult by purely virtual cooperation.

project language

In this bi-national project between Germany and Hungary, language represents a challenge for both countries that should not be underestimated. According to VO, the language used in all projects with Hungary to date has been German, in the rarest cases English, as the project language in which most or even all communication takes place or still takes place (cf. Interview I, 0210; 0457-0468). Since most Hungarians involved in this type of binational project or corresponding with German employees in their daily work have a sufficiently good knowledge of German, this has so far proved to be a common solution.

In addition to Hungarian project members, however, Hungarian employees who speak little or no German are also part of the team in the project, which is investigating this work. One of the Hungarian SAP specialists, who is acting as external consultants for this HCM implementation, also has no knowledge of German, but only English. Consequently, the team meetings are held in German, English and Hungarian. SI describes this language constellation in an interview as a "challenge" (Interview II, 0191) and "very interesting" (ibid., 0194).

LP plays a leading role in these team meetings as an interpreter, often translating for the Hungarian side when she notices that the German team members and external consultants misunderstand each other in the common English language or certain technical words cannot be translated. The challenge for LP is always to reproduce content completely and, above all, comprehensibly for all participants.

To define a certain project language, for example by "saying (.) that everyone (.) is forced to [...] communicate (1,0) [in] English or to keep all documents in English [...]" (Interview II, 0211-0214) SI considers not to be feasible due to the different language levels of the individual project members. In his opinion, the use of all three languages within meetings and the associated flexibility in code switching should be maintained (see ibid., 0215-0232). Even if a fixed project language does not actually exist in the meetings, important documents are still created in a specific language, either in German or in English (cf. ibid. 0234-0236).

VO describes the switching in the area of languages in the team meetings as "[...] a bit exhausting, but nevertheless feasible" (Interview I, 0484).

Challenges in cooperation

Cross-border cooperation presents the German-Hungarian project team not only with linguistic challenges but also with other not insignificant ones.

In its narratives of cultural differences, VO refers to typical stereotypes and assigns a certain truthfulness to them. Thus she describes the Germans as "very meticulous" (ibid., 0218) and able to work (cf. ibid.). SI also sees significant

cultural differences between Germans and Hungarians with regard to their working methods and mentions classical stereotypical features.

He sees particularly extreme cultural differences between "Eastern European" (ibid., 0448) states and North America. As an example, he cites a typical business dinner in North America, where "[...] the shop is actually only closed at dinner in the evening [...]" (ibid., 0449-0451). In countries such as Hungary or Romania, on the other hand, there are strict hierarchies between superiors and employees, some of which are met with incomprehension among Germans.

LP sees no cultural challenges in this respect, unlike VO and SI. She argues that only two nationalities are involved in this project. There are small things that would indicate cultural differences, but they would not cause any difficulties (see Interview III, 0156-0158; 0163-0166). Although she notes that some topics require more time due to linguistic difficulties, this challenge was not an insurmountable task due to the good working atmosphere between German and Hungarian project members. She describes her German colleagues as "very patient" (ibid., 0168) and "objective" (ibid., 0171). In addition, they always give "clear feedback" to their Hungarian team mates (ibid., 0172).

In his presentation, SI also emphasizes the need for the project members of both countries to get to know each other and to spend time together. Because the more different people are involved in a project like this, the more "interesting" (Interview II, 0467) but also "more challenging" (ibid., 0469) the cooperation turns out to be. The regular meetings at the Hungarian site therefore improved teamwork and, according to LP, helped to build trust and be more open with each other (cf. Interview III, 0180).

VO cites as a characteristic example humour, which differs even more in an intercultural context. Even if the sense of humour is a generally positively acknowledged human characteristic, not all people have the same "sense of humour". This fact is even reinforced by the intercultural aspect, which often leads to humour not being taken up and understood in the same way by all interlocutors. She also emphasises that when talking to people from other cultures, it is not only the exact wording that has to be observed, but above all the way in which people communicate with each other.

team spirit

Both the German employees, VO and SI and their Hungarian colleague LP answer the question of whether the project members see and perceive themselves as a team despite the predominantly spatial distance. In the course of her remarks, VO emphasizes that although this team is "a bit more sensitive towards each other [...]" (Interview I, 0294) and has a relationship with each other that is not quite as "extremely cooperative[s]" (ibid., 0296), as is the case for example with her work colleagues in her specialist team in Germany (ibid., 0296), she nevertheless regards the Hungarian project staff as team colleagues. According to her, a project of this size can only be created as a team (ibid., 0292). Otherwise "[...] this construct would not work either" (ibid., 0300), which is why "[...] everyone would have to pull together" (ibid., 0301) and this "happen in the team [...]" (ibid., 0302).

According to SI, it is particularly important for employees who do not yet know each other at the beginning of the project that "the two (0.3) establish a connection not only at the [...] factual level [...]" (Interview II, 0089), but also at the relationship level (see ibid., 0090-0091). This would make subsequent communication, which would often take place virtually (cf. ibid., 0092-0094). Thus, non-business activities such as joint lunches and dinners are a necessary and not to be underestimated component in order to find a common basis and strengthen team spirit (cf. ibid., 0115-0118).

Since team-building measures are often not possible in practice due to time and cost-intensive resources, the company relies on a so-called kick-off meeting at the beginning of the project, in which not only the goals of the project are presented but also perceived as an opportunity to get to know each other (cf. Interview I, 0231-0324).

The company offers intercultural training for all employees in order to inform themselves in advance about any cultural peculiarities and thereby facilitate teamwork. However, due to time and cost-intensive reasons, these seminars and training courses cannot be attended before the start of each new project. In the SAP HCM rollout, too, employees did not attend any intercultural training prior to the start of the project, possibly due to the many years of cooperation with the

Hungarian locations. Instead, the German employees asked their Hungarian colleagues who work at the German headquarters about the country's cultural characteristics in advance. VO sees it as a "great advantage" (Interview I, 0231) to also work with Hungarian colleagues in Germany on a daily basis. This enabled them to inform themselves "about the characteristic features of Hungarian culture" (ibid., 0233-0234) and thus "relatively well prepared" (ibid., 0236) to begin project cooperation. VO tells later:

6 Conclusion and reflection

This paper has attempted to examine multilingual, intercultural and virtual team communication using a transnational project in a company. In particular, the challenges to be mastered in such projects should be examined in more detail. To this end, a qualitative study was conducted on characteristics of authentic and complex team communication, which examined the communicative design of the project work. This paper provided a detailed view of the evaluation procedure of Philipp Mayring's qualitative structuring content analysis.

With regard to the research project, the results show some aspects of multilingual, intercultural and virtual communication in the team.

One of these features is the combination of virtual forms of communication with on-site visits. The team does not rely solely on the use of electronic communication tools such as e-mail and telephone conferences in its project work, but also opts for face-to-face meetings and visits to the Hungarian site.

Challenges that arise in project cooperation can be identified in both linguistic and cultural differences. Purely virtual collaboration also makes collaboration more difficult due to technical faults and the lack of metacommunication, which is often not transmitted via telephone and e-mail. Nevertheless, the different project members perceive the challenges to varying degrees.

As a result, the project members perceive themselves as a team, despite the fact that most of them are geographically separated. This feeling is intensified above all by the monthly meetings at the Hungarian location and the extra-business activities to which the project members attach particular importance.

As only a few members of the project team could be interviewed for the present work, the work unfortunately does not claim to be complete facts and opinions on communication practice in this project. This requires an analysis of several interviews. The analysis elaborated here could therefore have been further deepened by further interviews with project members.

With regard to my investigation, I would like to make a few critical comments. I conducted the interviews in a company that I already knew from an internship I had completed there. Therefore, I was already influenced by subjective perceptions and ideas before the interviews. During my internship last year, I already got an insight into the transnational project work and also into the related challenges regarding linguistic and cultural differences. I also knew the WebEx conference system, as well as its advantages and disadvantages.

In discussions with various employees at this time, I already gained an insight into the different departments, the differently pronounced networking with departments of other locations and the procedure for projects with different countries and cultures. At this time, I was also involved in the conception of an intercultural and virtual training for all employees and was present at some of these trainings. Here too, through discussions and discussions with the various participants, I learned some interesting aspects and, above all, challenges that come along with cross-border cooperation.

As a result, I may not have been able to remain as objective as a researcher in this field both in the interviews and in the subsequent analysis and evaluation. This is also evident when listening to the interviews. Here it can be clearly heard that the neutral style of communication as described by Lamnek is hardly adhered to. On the one hand, this has the reason that even before the interviews, i.e. during the greeting, I was already offered you, which in itself created a very familiar atmosphere in the room. On the other hand, I could not and did not want to apply the neutral style because it is not in my nature to sit as emotionless and unresponsive as possible towards my interview partners. But the much more important reason was that I intuitively fell into a softer style of communication, because it made me feel more able to encourage my interview partners to tell stories and to take away their fear of saying something wrong in their view.

When selecting the people to talk to, it must be noted that I could not choose them myself and therefore it must be borne in mind that the company deliberately made these three people available to me for certain reasons and interests.

Also my interview partners could possibly already consider themselves some answers by my Powerpoint presentation, which they had received in the apron, and prepare themselves thereby better for the discussion. That is why some issues were deliberately not addressed from their point of view, which can also be seen as a disadvantage in retrospect.

Furthermore, I could have done a problem-centered or narrative interview instead of a guideline interview. However, as mentioned in a previous chapter, I was unsure about the narrative competence of my interview partners. The risk of possibly receiving too little information or too many different answers therefore prevented me. In my opinion, however, the guideline basis for the present interviews was not a disadvantage, as I was able to classify the answers into some categories in a more structured way. Especially when talking to SI, I consider the guide to be a useful tool, as I noticed during listening and transcribing that some non-relevant topics were addressed, which unfortunately I could not use for my research work. The third interview may also have been more relevant to the topic than would have been possible without a guide. But especially in this interview I should have asked my questions more easily, because LP had bigger difficulties to understand them.

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