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**The professional collaboration with German employees,  
source of difficulties and expectations? A Qualitative analysis  
of the German behaviour in a professional and intercultural  
environment.**

Compendium to the master thesis

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## **Abstract**

### **Abstract:**

Even though intercultural trainings have been developed in Germany since the 1980s (Erll & Gymnich, 2017, p. 152) and interculturality is a key competence at the present time (Erll & Gymnich, 2017, p. 6), it remains difficult for people from a non-German cultural background to work with German employees in their work environment (Erll & Gymnich, 2017, p. 103). The aim of this thesis is to understand the behaviour of German employees in work environments and to analyse how this behaviour impacts expatriates in positive or negative ways as well as which expectations German and non-German employees have in these contexts. The study is based on a qualitative analyse realised on one hand with two German experts in the professional interculturality and on the other hand with five expatriates that work with Germans in Germany. The study attempts to make recommendations, to improve, and facilitate the relations in intercultural teams of German and non-German employees.

### **Key words**

Intercultural communication - expatriate expectations - German expectations - German professional behaviour - professional interculturality - intercultural professional environment - intercultural openness

### **Résumé:**

Malgré le développement des formations interculturelles en Allemagne depuis les années 80 (Erll & Gymnich, Probleme interkultureller Kommunikation und mögliche Bewältigungsstrategien, 2017, p. 152) et l'importance de la compétence interculturelle comme compétence clé aujourd'hui (Erll & Gymnich, Probleme interkultureller Kommunikation und mögliche Bewältigungsstrategien, 2017, p. 6), il reste difficile pour les individus ne provenant pas de culture allemande de cotoyer des Allemands dans un environnement professionnel (Erll & Gymnich, Probleme interkultureller Kommunikation und mögliche Bewältigungsstrategien, 2017, p. 103). Le but de ce mémoire est de comprendre le comportement allemand dans un contexte professionnel, ainsi que l'impact de ce comportement sur les expatriés, notamment car il crée des difficultés pour ces derniers. En outre, l'étude menée révèle certaines attentes à la fois

des travailleurs allemands vis-à-vis des expatriés mais aussi des expatriés qui travaillent avec des Allemands. Une étude qualitative a été menée d'une part avec deux expertes de l'interculturalité professionnelle, et d'autre part avec cinq expatriés travaillant en Allemagne avec des Allemands. L'étude vise à proposer des recommandations pour améliorer les relations dans des équipes de travail composées d'Allemands et de non-Allemands.

**Mots-clés :** Communication interculturelle - Attentes expatriées - Attentes allemandes - Comportements professionnels allemands – Interculturalité dans le monde du travail - Difficultés interculturelles - Environnement de travail interculturel - Ouverture interculturelle

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

At the present time, intercultural competence is a key skill in a context of globalisation, internationalising and multiculturalism (Erll & Gymnich, 2017, p. 6) which has gotten more important over the last 20 years. The phenomenon consequently brings all forms of professional organisations to internationalise and to cooperate with teams and partner from different cultures. Even though intercultural trainings have been developed and more knowledge about intercultural team-working has been acquired, professional organisations always struggle with the management of their intercultural teams. Loth explains the intercultural team-working demands a close collaboration between persons from different beliefs, values and behaviours (Loth, 2009, p. 327). Moreover, Loth describes an intercultural team-working as a team composed of three members from different cultures at least (Loth, 2009, p. 329). Furthermore, several problems in terms of behaviours and way of communication remain in an intercultural working environment. That is why it is necessary to set up strategies in order to beat the odds (Erll & Gymnich, 2017, p. 103).

The following study aims to take a look at the behaviours of Germans in an intercultural working environment. That is why this study wants to define the German behaviour at work. Moreover, the study which is conducted with no-German-culture people working with Germans disclose the difficulties from these persons and the expectations from Germans regarding expatriates as well as the expectations from expatriates regarding Germans employees in order to give some recommendations for the improvement of

work conditions in an intercultural working environment between Germans employees and expatriates.

This study is based on an expert interview conducted on the 9th June 2017 with Julia Birnbaum-Crowson und Friederike Krause, two experts in the area of professional interculturality, at the same time as the literary research. The aim of the combination was to delimitate the research framework and to focus on specific aspects which are relevant to be deepened. The expert interview enables to validate, put some aspect aside and to disclose other relevant aspects for the research.

After the delimitation of pertinent aspects according to the literature and the expert interview, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with five expatriates who work in Germany with Germans employees. These five persons have been selected according to specific criteria which are defined in the methods part. The choice for the semi-structured interview framework is justified by this certain freedom for the interviewed persons to express what they want. An interview guide has been used to conduct the interview in order to deal with all pertinent topics enabling to answer the research aims (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2008, pp. 67-91).

The second chapter deals with three relevant theoretical aspects: the description of the German culture according to Hofstede and Schroll-Machl, the importance of the role and its expectations as well as some communicative aspects of the German behaviour in communication. The third chapter presents the qualitative methods conducted with two experts in the professional interculturality and five expatriates working with Germans employees. The fourth chapter is about the analyse of the data collection during the semi-structured interviews which shows 7 main categories of information composed of subcategories. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the interpretation of the analyse (chapter 4) correlating with the theoretical part (chapter 2) before to concluding.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The German culture**

#### **2.1.1. German cultural dimensions (Geert Hofstede)**

According to Hofstede, Germany has a low power distance society which is manifested by direct and participative communication. The German society is considered as a so-

ciety in which people try to control the uncertainty. Germany is an individualist society in which the most important values are the obligations, the responsibilities as well as the personal choices. Germany is a masculine society based on performance and success. Finally, German culture focuses on the long-term orientation with pragmatic behaviour.

### **2.1.2. German cultural standard (Sylvia Schroll-Machl)**

- Description of the cultural standard, “Kulturstandart “, from Thomas

Thomas and Utler define the culture as a specific reference system which meets strict interpretations and functions for a nation, a society as well as a group (Thomas & Utler, 2013, p. 48).

- German cultural standard from Schroll-Machl

Schroll-Machl’s study is based on her working experiences and the experiences of expatriates with German workers (Schroll-Machl, 2016, pp. 18-19) and describes the German cultural standard. Firstly, the facts are priority in a working environment in Germany according to Schroll-Machl through a rational behaviour and the use of detailed documentation (Schroll-Machl, 2016, pp. 49-50). Germans appreciate experts in a specific area. In addition, the notion of “*Kosten-Nutzen-Überlegung*” influences the German behaviour (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 54). Secondly, the compliance with rules and organisations is another German cultural standard which manifests as implicit rules with moral character as the punctuality and explicit rules as the “contract or engagement” which guarantees security and insurance. A consequence of the respect of rules is the lack of flexibility and spontaneity. It contradicts Hofstede’ idea about a real flexibility of Germans. Thirdly, the German world of work is oriented by rules and this internalized control which is considered as clear guidelines. The job description plays a significant role and has to be respected. Moreover, the rules are perceived as duties in the German world of work because of its moral nature. Fourthly, Schroll-Machl mentions the importance of the time management at work in Germany where the goal is the use of time with effectiveness (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 124). Anticipation and planning are the keywords. Moreover, the control of schedule in terms of appointment and deadline for the tasks is vital. Spontaneity is not a German character trait because it is considered disruptive. It illustrates a lack of flexibility in a German working environment. In the time management, the work schedule has an important role and it is perceived negative

to remain after the working time at the work. The establishment of priorities is vital. The last German cultural standard is the separation of the professional area from the private area. The relation remains professional and formal. The proximity relation with co-workers is not common for German employees. Moreover, Germans are rational and separate their emotion from objective facts. Emotions are perceived as weakness. However, Germans rely on humour through joking in order to create an improvement of the atmosphere. Furthermore, the working relation is characterised by the formal character according to Schroll-Machl. They establish a participative communication through which they exchange information and ideas and every participant can express his opinions about the decisions taken.

## **2.2. The role influence and its expectations**

### **2.2.1. The notion of role**

Rocheblave describes the role as a “cultural model” or “behaviour model” (Rocheblave, 1963, p. 303) that is organised by conducts depending on the position of the person. The person has to adjust to his position. That is why the context and the status are fundamental point because they define the role characteristics. The role is composed of expectations and code in the process of communication (Rocheblave, 1963, p. 303). Rocheblave adds the role give each person a behaviour and an identification (Rocheblave, 1963, p. 302). That means the role creates expectations of persons who should deliver them. Fougeryollas and Roy take the idea of Lumpkin that explicates the social roles depend on the traditions, norms and values of the global society while those define codes and norms linked with a precise position in the same culture or society (Fougeryollas & Roy, 1996, p. 42). The person should adjust him at his position.

### **2.2.2. The role expectations: “*Rollenerwartungen*”**

Dahrendorf describes the social role as a set of expectations which are associated with the behaviour of the person responsible for specific situations in a society (Dahrendorf, 2006, p. 37). The role changes depending to the and influences persons. It frequently refers to the notion of “status” that is characterised by Fischer as the objective position occupied by a person according to the social level. Moreover, the status is composed of a set of objective characteristics (Fischer, 2015, p. 77). Fischer links the status and the role; The role is the subjective aspect of the status that is considered as rules of conduct

prescribed at the person (Fischer, 2015, p. 77). Hence, the status demands expectations of the person who should deliver them in order to not be sanctioned.

### **2.2.3. The role expectations interrelated with the German cultural character traits**

- Expectations interrelated with the cultural dimensions from Hofstede

The « power of distance » dimension from Hofstede creates some expectations of people depending on the context and the type of professional structures in which the people are. Concerning the “uncertainty avoidance” German people expect of a task planning in detail in order to avoid potential risks. Moreover, because of the individualist society, an important expectation in Germany is about the involvement for the obligations and responsibilities. Furthermore, the German society is masculine. That means it is expected to perform and be involved at work. To conclude this part, Hofstede describes Germans expect pragmatism and flexibility what Schroll-Machl contradicts.

- Expectations interrelated with the German cultural standard from Schroll-Machl

Firstly, According to Schroll-Machl, Germans expect of the respect of roles depending on the structure which is considered by them as professionalism (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 148). Germans have expectations in terms of the workstation, the achievement of tasks and aims. The role of the job description is consequently vital. Moreover, German people expect of the use of written documentation as reliable sources for the argumentation about ideas. Secondly, it is expected to respect the rules and structures. Rules are obligations and responsibilities (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 97) which depend on the workstation. The position gives the employee some obligations and responsibilities to assume if he does not want to be sanctioned (Dahrendorf, 2006, p. 50). Thirdly, the German vision in the long run expects of employees to plan and organise their task and time. Moreover, because the notion “time management” is essential in Germany, it is expected of employees to respect the given time and plan the appointment. The last expectation concerns the relational behaviour which should remain only professional. This means one has to keep a certain distance with his colleagues. The relation develops through the professional competencies and employee has to be involved for his tasks. Birnbaum-Crowson and Krause justify the same idea. Furthermore, the use of *vous* is expected in the communication between supervisor and employees.

## **2.3. The intercultural communication and the German communication style**

### **2.3.1. The use of meta-communication**

Schulz von Thun describes the meta-communication as a communication method for thematising intercultural shocks and conflicts in order to beat these odds. People can understand these problems and adjust them thanks to the meta-communication (Schulz von Thun, 1981, p. 101). It is a prerequisite in an intercultural context (Carpentier, Demorgon, Lenhard, & Müller, 2014, pp. 170-171). Krause justifies this idea and adds the meta-communication helps to be closer with the other. However, the meta-communication has some limits in terms of cultural origins or similarities (Krause) and in terms of personality (Schulz von Thun).

### **2.3.2. Verbal communication and non-verbal communication**

Verbal communication and non-verbal communication are vital in intercultural environment because they take an essential place in the cooperation.

- Verbal communication

Verbal communication is composed of all oral and linguistic exchanges between people. Moreover, verbal communication is characterised through four components: listening, questioning, explanation and the use of humour (Röhner & Schütz, 2016).

- Non-verbal communication

There is an interdependence between the verbal communication and the non-verbale communication in the process of understanding und interpretation of exchanges between people (Ehrhardt, 2002, p. 13). Schugk explains the role of the non-verbal communication through this intensive transmission of information (Schugk, 2014, pp. 151-152). It plays an essential role in intercultural environment because it often brings people about misunderstandings und conflicts (Erll & Gymnich, 2017, p. 110) because of the similar form of non-verbal communication can have different signification between from one culture to another (Maletzke, p. 91). Moreover, the non-verbal forms are underestimated in spite of their big importance. Different non-verbal forms can be distinguished according to Erll, Gymnich and Heringer: the gesture and face impressions, the eye contact, the proximity and tactile as well as the paralinguistic signs.



### **2.3.3. Tools for the communication and linguistic difficulties**

This part presents some tools for the communication and the linguistic difficulties. The exchange of email messages is the most frequent task in a working context with an estimation of 80% of the daily communication (Incelli, 2008, p. 115). Day and Wagner speak about this routine in the communication (Day & Wagner, 2007). Moreover, the email correspondence helps in the development of relations (Jakobs, 2005, p. 32). It helps to stay in contact and to prepare future exchange face-to-face (Schönberger, 2003, p. 131). Furthermore, people can control their emotions because the exchange is indirect and give time for reflecting and distancing (Schönberger, 2003, p. 128). Concerning the use of phone conversations, it is considered as intrusive communication support (Jakobs, 2005, p. 32). In addition, telephone interrupts tasks and is perceived as an excuse to get in contact with another person whereas it is not necessary (Jakobs, 2005, p. 32).

The oral communication is considered by non-native speakers as the most difficult task in the communication according to Incelli. The phone conversations and the problem for expressing his opinions and ideas at meetings (Incelli, 2008, p. 115). Moreover, another difficulty is caused by “*specific language deficiencies*” in terms of “*inaccurate grammar, inappropriate lexis, mother-tongue interference*” with foreign languages (Incelli, 2008, p. 115).

### **2.3.4. German communicative behaviour**

Communication in Germany is direct, pragmatic, functional and effective. Schroll-Machl and Hanke add the communication is explicit (Hanke, 2014). Krause justifies the idea of Schroll-Machl about this directness that can be hurtful. Moreover, the German communication is based on honesty, sincerity as explained by Birnbaum-Crowson and Krause. Another important point concerning the typical German communication is the determination for transmitting an information in particular during negotiations. Concerning Smalltalk this communicative tool is vital in the development of relation in intercultural environment. It helps to create basic contacts and improve the climate of confidence between the employees. However, Germans do not use it as explained above because it is not in relation to the actual work. (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 56).

### **3. METHODS**

This part will present the framework of the study which helps to deliver the research questions.

#### **3.1. Pre-investigation with two experts in this field**

In order to define the study and to concentrate on specific aspects I organised an expert interview (« *Experteninterview* ») with the two presidents of the association aubiko e.V.<sup>1</sup> on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2017. This interview was oriented by the reading of numerous scientific papers and by experiences. An interview guide which was created from the framework of Sabine Misoch (Misoch, 2015) and the framework of Aglaja Przyborski and Monika Wohlrab Sahr (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2008, pp. 67-91), helped to conduct this expert interview. Those two interviewed persons, Julia Birnbaum-Crowson and Friederike Krause gained a lot of working and personal experiences with foreigners abroad. That is why I chose to conduct this interview with them.

This expert interview that is not anonymised with the writing consent of the two interviewed persons was transcribed and analysed through a table of sequence analysis that shows the topic concerned. It made it possible to validate or leave some aspects out and to disclose new aspects that are more relevant for the study. That is why the study focuses only on the aspect we can find in the theoretical part. Moreover, it justifies the theoretical part.

#### **3.2. Data collection**

A qualitative study was investigated in order to deliver answers about the research questions. The aim of this study is to deepen social phenomena (Misoch, 2015, p. 13) within the work environment. That is why semi-structured interviews were conducted since the qualitative framework allows to speak about specific topics and to give the participants the freedom to express what they want (Misoch, 2015, pp. 13-14). Moreover, the choice of the framework is explained by this flexibility (Misoch, 2015, pp. 2-4).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with five persons who were not born in Germany and work in Germany with German people. The choice of persons is justified

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<sup>1</sup><http://aubiko.de/startseite/>

by “purposive sample” interrelated with the goals of the study (Misoch, 2015, pp. 189-192). The sample considers the following criteria:

- The interviewed persons are men or women,
- The interviewed persons are not born in Germany,
- The interviewed persons are working,
- The interviewed persons have at least one year of working experience with German people,
- The interviewed persons interact with German people at the work.

The aim was to find five persons that correspond to these criteria. I posted an ad in the group on Facebook “International Career in Hamburg” during July 2017. After a couple of days I got several replies from people who wanted to participate in the study. I picked five persons for the semi-structured interviews which took place from the 22<sup>nd</sup> until the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017 depending on the people’s availability. One interview was conducted per day. Four of the five interviews took place in my student room in Hamburg in order to have a silent place to facilitate the discussion and the downstream transcription. The interview with the fifth person happened at his work place. That is why there are many background noises on the audio recording. The average duration of the interviews is 43 minutes. The interviews were recorded in order to be transcribed later and to avoid noting down during the interviews and to pay attention of the interviewed person.

One interview guide in French and German was written for the purposes of conducting the interview as support for the orientation of the discussion. It includes 16 open questions with some example which were used in the cases in which the interviewed person does not have ideas to deepen the subject. The one interview guide was written through the framework of Sabine Misoch (Misoch, 2015, p. 68). That is why it is divided into four parts. Firstly, the information phase (« *Informationsphase* ») in which the interviewed person gets information about the study and the goal of the interview and give their writing agreement for the use of data. The second phase is called the introduction phase (« *Aufwärm- oder Einstiegsphase* ») in which the interviewed person introduces himself and explains what he is doing in Germany. The next phase is the most important phase (« *Hauptphase* ») which deals with the relevant subjects for the study. That is why it is divided into two parts: the cultural impact and the aspect of the communication. Finally, the last phase is the finishing phase (« *Ausklang-und Abschlussphase* »)

with a positive question to conclude the interview on a positive point and after this a short debriefing about this interview.

### 3.3. Selection of the sample

The sample of the interviewed persons have been defined through different selection criteria interrelated with the goals of the study. All of the participants (from P1 to P5) are not born in Germany and were 27-30 age group/old at the time of the study. They work and live in Hamburg for at least one year and they gained a working experience with German people between one and more than 6 years. The interviewed persons come from different cultures, from France, Belgium, Bulgaria and Romania. There is one difference between them in the linguistic skills. Indeed, two of them have only basic language skills while the others are fluent speakers of German. The complete information about the five interviewed persons is in the following table:

<b>Interviewed persons</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>
<b>Age</b>	28	27	30	29	27
<b>Gender</b>	M	F	M	F	f
<b>Citizenship</b>	French	French	Belgian	Bulgarian	Romanian
<b>Place of domicile</b>	Hamburg	Hamburg	Hamburg	Hamburg	Hamburg
<b>Present work</b>	Lead Community Manager	Procurement contract Manager	Head of Sales	Student assistant	Office Manager
<b>In Germany since</b>	4 years	4 years	More than 6 years	More than one year	3 years
<b>Work experience in Germany</b>	4 years	4 years	6 years	1 years	3 years
<b>Spoken language</b>	French English German Spanish	French English German Spanish	French English German	Bulgarian English German Danish	French English German Spanish Romanian
<b>Language level</b>	Mother tongue C1 A1/A2 A1	Mother tongue C1 A1/A2 A1	Mother tongue C1 C1	Mother tongue C2 C1 B1	C1 C2 C1 B2 Mother tongue

**Table 1: Information about the five interviewed persons**

### **3.4. Data analysis**

#### **3.4.1. The transcription**

The written transcription of interviews follows the GAT2 transcription system<sup>2</sup> (Auer, et al., 2009). In order to answer the research questions, I only analysed and interpreted the words in terms of contents and meaning. I need not to dwell on the emotions and linguistic expression. Hence, the framework of minimal transcript « *Minimaltranskription* » (Auer, et al., 2009, p. 359) had been chosen for the analyse of interviews. Furthermore, all of the conventions had been used for the analysis because the analyse focuses on the content and meaning but only the most important rules that is vital for the development of the research.

The transcription was realised with the software ELAN 4.9.4<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the words have not been modified and corrected in terms of linguistic corrections but some details about the meaning of words from one of the interviewed persons is given when it was not very clear and comprehensible. Thus, the transcription keeps all words that the interviewed persons expressed. Furthermore, the participants' name as well as the name of organisation are anonymised.

The interviews realisation has one anomaly with P5 because two questions (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> question) have been interchanged during the interview because of a lack of concentration.

#### **3.4.2. Tool of analysis and data assessment**

The following analysis focuses on the content and meaning of words that the interviewed persons expressed. As a first step, a sequence analysis table has been developed in order to get a first overview about the information given by the interviewed persons. As a second step, all of the sentences expressed by the interviewed persons haven been added/inserted and analysed in a excel table. All sentences are codified according to the meaning of the words without being influenced by the interview guide. Many sentences are used for different categories. An overview of this table is presented below:

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<sup>2</sup>Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem 2 (GAT 2)

<sup>3</sup><https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/>

**Table 2: Overview of the analysis table with codifications and categorisation of sentences from the interviewed persons**

Through the realised codification, different categories have been created. The analysis comprises 531 quotes from the interviews which are analysed and categorised in 7 major categories. Every major category is composed of subcategories. There are 24 subcategories as we can see in the following table:

Catégories	Sous-catégories
Culture	-Faits -Orientation des relations -Empreinte des règles et des structures -Rôle du temps
Communication	-Accent, facteur d'un manque de légitimité -Attitudes allemandes -Contenu de la conversation -Outils de la communication
Attentes allemandes	-Réalisation des tâches -Respect des règles et des structures -Comportements -Gestion du temps
Apports	-Compétences -Manière de travailler -Relations professionnelles
Difficulté des expatriés	-Manière de travailler allemand -Atmosphère de travail -Manque de compréhension interculturelle -Langues étrangères
Attentes des expatriés	-Compréhension interculturelle -Manière de travailler -Orientation des relations informelles
Amélioration	-Communication -Constitution des équipes -Formation

**Table 3: Overview of the categories and subcategories from the data analysis**

## **4. RESULTS**

The words from the five interviewed persons have been categorised into seven groups as explained in the previous chapter.

### **4.1. Culture aspects**

#### **4.1.1. Facts**

- Professionalism

The interviewed persons mention that Germans are very professional in their working environment. Germans expect people to perform the tasks (P1, P4 et P5). Moreover, P1 and P3 talk about the rationality by German employees that rarely show emotions. They are stricter and the relations remain professional.

- Written documentation

In the importance of the priority of facts in Germany, the use of written documentation plays an essential role in order to prove and justify works and words. Written documentation gives legitimacy. P3 adds Germans develop this results-based culture and this fulfilled culture (“culture of “erledigt<sup>4</sup>”). As a consequence, improvisation is very rare and Germans perceive it negatively. Moreover, the tasks and actions are very factual and formalised. That is why Germans use written documentation as protocol, report or email. Furthermore, P5 explains the reason of written documentation use as a way of protecting from some potential problems because Germans do not trust and are suspicious.

- Expertise

The last aspect about the importance of facts is the role of expertise. P2 and P5 mention the needs for Germans to resort to specialist in a specific area. P2 explains many colleagues are specialists in a specific area and know their area in detail. P5 adds the experience plays a significant role in the process of convincing German employees to concur with an idea. P5 gives the example based on his home country, Romania, for which Germans accepted his ideas because he has more experience with this country. Thus, experiences legitimate ideas in this case.

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<sup>4</sup> Le mot allemand « erledigt » se comprend dans ce contexte comme « accompli » ou « réglé ».

#### **4.1.2. Orientation of relations**

The relations between employees are characterised as professional in a working environment in Germany. The interviewed persons describe the relation focuses on the work and they are more formal, professional, distant and austere. Moreover, P1 adds the personal relation does not exist and Germans do not try to know their colleagues. The professional and private relations are completely separated according to P4 who has no contact with his colleagues after the work. However, P2 contradicts it by explaining these relations with his German colleagues are close and after-work activities exist. About the discussion topics three participants (P2, P4 and P5) explain the topic about holidays is recurring. Moreover, P3 notes German employees develop their professional network with efficiency. Another aspect is the lack of human contacts with German employees according to P1. P4 characterises the relation as distant and would not request a colleague's help for a personal problem.

#### **4.1.3. The influence of rules and structures**

- The respect of the German process

As four interviewed persons (P1, P2, P3 et P5) explain, the respect of the process is recurrent and essential in working environment in Germany. This respect of the rules is described as strict and inflexible and this respect is fixed in the professional structures in Germany. Moreover, this respect of rules is described by participants as a process. P3 and P5 use the German word "Prozess" to characterise it. Furthermore, this respect stands for the task realisation. It is expected by German that the tasks and responsibilities on the job description are assumed severely on time. In addition, the realisation of tasks has to be done in exact accordance with the process according to P3 who adds there is a certain image as a role model that employees should have. In other words, the realisation of tasks should respect the procedure and the expected results. The last point is the punctuality which should be respected. It is a part of the rules and it is very important for Germans. This punctuality is to understand in terms of work schedule and deadline for tasks.

- The German inflexibility

This respect of rules is characterised by the interviewed persons as a lack of flexibility. They believe that German employees not flexible. P1, P2 and P5 explain the lack of flexibility through the use of job description which any employee has to respect. Ger-



mans only do the tasks from this job description. Moreover, the participants describe the inflexibility through the lack of initiative which they justify by the fear from German of uncertainty. They have a lack of spontaneity. P5 talks about the dependency on the routine. P1 agrees the idea that German employees do not want to change their habits. P5 adds they want to avoid new responsibilities. Another aspect mentioned by P3 is the lack of flexibility in terms of necessary adjustments of working methods when Germans collaborate with other cultures. They are convinced that their working methods are better and consequently they do not reassess themselves. However, German employees can be flexible according to P2 if they have the authorisation of their supervisor and the usual procedure is respected. This needs for hierarchical authorisation is omnipresent in the working environment in Germany.

#### **4.1.4. The time's role**

The interviewed persons mention the importance of the time in a working environment in Germany. That is why German employees demonstrate through the necessity of efficiency, the lack of flexibility and the importance of work schedule. Firstly, employees have to be efficient during the working time. P3 talks about culture of efficiency. That means employees should perform the most tasks during the working time and consequently get to the point. Secondly, certain participants mention the organisation of the working day with the meaning of coffee break or lunch break. In comparison with their own culture they observe some differences. P1 and P4 describe the lunch break not as a real break but rather a time during which German people are working by meeting partners or colleagues from other services in order to present their projects or strategies. Thirdly, some participants explain that it is poorly regarded to stay at work after his work schedule because the work time is defined precisely in Germany. As a last point, P5 describe the German time perception in terms of money and links a real relation between time and this value in terms of money. That is why P5 concludes German employees don't take initiatives because it needs time.

## **4.2. Communication**

The interviewed persons characterised German employees in the communication through different aspect such as the accent, the behaviour, the content and the tools.

#### **4.2.1. The accent as a factor of lack of legitimacy**

Two participants (P3 and P4) comment the German behaviour concerning their accent. German employees do not seem to take non-native speakers with an accent seriously. P3 talks about a lack of legitimacy because of his accent. Moreover, these two participants explain that people with an accent feel as “funny guys” and P4 says Germans openly make fun of his accent.

#### **4.2.2. German behaviour**

- Professionalism

German employees adopt a professional, serious and formal communication. The work is at the centre of the communication and P1 explains the discussions are very formalised in comparison with his own culture. P1 adds his German colleagues know nothing about his life and private life. The relations are consequently strictly professional. P2, P4 and P5 accentuate this idea by telling the social contacts are very rarely and German employees avoid talking about their private life.

- Directness

The communication in Germany is characterised by the interviewed persons as direct, precise and concrete. P1 describe it as “bullet points, that is to say a communication using key words in order to get to the point. P2 and P4 underline this rapidity in the transmission of information. P2 find this communication efficient and pragmatic. Moreover, P2 mentions the positive impact of the adjustment to these German communicative characteristics which facilitates the communication. P5 says Germans are surprised when he uses this way of communication. However, P5 notes German people do not use this directness to talk about private topics. A last point underlining this directness is this way to interrupt during face-to-face discussions or phone conversations. P5 explains the necessity to interrupt the other in order to express his ideas and opinions because German colleagues do not offer the possibility to clarify his ideas.

- Desire for the critique contradiction

Another important point concerning the German communication is the criticism and this contradiction. P5 finds German employees frequently complain and P4 adds they criticise without real reasons. Moreover, the criticism is expressed by the directness as P1 explains. P3 agrees this idea by telling they are clear and openly criticise. However,

what is interesting is according to certain participants German employees do not initiate a direct conflict. Indeed, the idea is in the centre of the discussion and not the personality. Moreover, P2 and P4 explain Germans do not accept criticism and take the stand of automatic rejection and they withdraw into themselves.

- A certain lack of openness

The interviews reveal the lack of openness by German employees who are not attentive to the ideas of their colleagues and do not want to change their opinions according to P3 and P5. P5 finds the discussion with German unconstructive because they are not open for other opinions and it is necessary of insistence in order to be listened to. Moreover, German people are convinced by their work methods and lack adaptation in particular culturally during the implementation of project abroad, according to P3. However, P1 contradicts it by telling the use of participative communication in Germany through which every employee can express freely his opinions.

- Appearance

All of the interviewed persons describe the non-verbal communication in Germany as very discrete. P2 talks about the complexity to find non-verbal signs. Moreover, German people do not want to lose face and look contented according to P1 and P3. That is why they do not express emotions. Furthermore, P3 adds Germans hold the awkwardness in themselves before they communicate in a formal way with the person. It goes through a written invitation for a discussion. P1, P2 and P3 mention the idea that Germans do not say what they think. P1 describe their reaction as a “poker face”, that is to say any expression from the face. P3 qualifies it as a mark of hypocrisy which is usual in Germany. The next point mentioned by P1 is the ease to speak to a public in order to present ideas. As a last point, German employees are very expressive when they want to express unpleasant ideas. P2 adds it can possible to have German colleague who yell their opinions.

#### **4.2.3. Discussion content**

- Argumentation

The content of conversations developed by Germans is based on a solid argumentation. It should be organised and structured according to P5 who adds the importance of insistence through arguments. P3 explains the importance of facts as figures in the argu-

mentation in order to facilitate the communication. The improvisation consequently has no impact with German employees who reproach expatriates for vagueness. Moreover, the idea is in the centre of the discussion and not the personality according to P1 and P2. The use of “we” and the valorisation of the team is very frequent in the working environment in Germany according to P1.

- Interest-oriented discussions/topics

The dialogue with German employees is very complicated according to P2. The usual dialogue limits to formal things as “How are you?” according to P4. However, German talk more without stopping if they appreciate the topics as holidays according to P5. Moreover, the best way for communicating with Germans in particular during conflicts is to demonstrate the advantages from his ideas for German according to P5.

- Humour as non-recommended

The use of humour is difficult with German people that do not recognise some form of humour as irony or off-beat humour according to P1, P2 and P3. They have lots of difficulties to detect the irony and off-beat humour. Moreover, the usage of humour depends on the context and can cause damage during the work time according to P1 who has colleagues who do not appreciate it during the work time.

#### **4.2.4. Tools for the communication**

German employees frequently use three tools for the communication: email, phone and online tools. Three participants (P2, P4, P5) explain they use email conversations regularly. It enables to not disturb his colleagues according to P4. Moreover, P2 and P5 describe the role of email as formal. Indeed, P2 sends formal email after a meeting in order to diffuse and transmit important information. P5 adds he uses email after phone conversations in order to check that all information is understood and transmitted.

Other tools for the communication are used in Germany according to P1 and P4. There are the online tools as the online to-do-list which is shared by all members of the team in order to be aware of the work step from colleagues. P4 finds it more performing and productive than the use of email.

### **4.3. German expectations**

The words from the interviewed persons reveal some German expectation in the working environment. Firstly, German people expect people to perform their missions according to the most participants. They expect professionalism at work according to P1 and P3 talks about a result-oriented culture which demands proof for the mission completed. Germans do not expect people to take leads but these follow the routine in order to not make work more complicated according to P4 and P5. It is vital to follow and respect the process. Secondly, Germans have expectations concerning the respect of rules and structures according P1, P3 and P5. They expect of expatriates that they adjust, respect as well as follow the process. It means the respect of colleagues and hierarchy. Thirdly, Germans have expectations in terms of cultural characters. They appreciate clichés according to P1, P2 and P3 who describe the game of the other culture. In other words, Germans expect expatriates to adjust to the typical German cultural characteristics but they expect as well that expatriates meet the typically cultural characteristics from their own culture through clichés. In the opposite way, Germans will do the same. It seems to relax the atmosphere. Finally, German employees have expectations in terms of time management like punctuality which is vital in German according to P4. This punctuality has to be understood in the respect of work schedule and deadline for tasks which have to be accomplished in time.

### **4.4. Contribution of the work with Germans**

This subchapter reveals the contribution of working with Germans. The participants mention two aspects: the competencies and the respect of rules. Firstly, the work with Germans brought to the participant knowledge about the German culture and the German behaviour according to P4 and P5. P4 learnt about the German tradition. P5 learnt more about the German behaviour and to be more individualist and to think about himself as well as to manage his time. Moreover, two participants (P3 and P4) improve their German linguistic skills thanks to the contacts and tasks in German. Secondly, P1 and P3 reveal to have learnt about the work methods in Germany which they characterise as thorough and efficient. P3 adds he has developed his professional network significantly since he is working in Germany.

## **4.5. Expatriate difficulties**

This subchapter deals with the difficulties from expatriates in working environment with German.

### **4.5.1. The way of working**

Expatriates have difficulties with the way of working in Germany in particular in terms of flexibility and dependence on the routine. The fact to follow the process makes the work inflexible which is a significant difficulty for all the participants. All the participants explain Germans expect that employees follow the process in order to accomplish the task. The importance is the respect of the process and the result. However, the result has signification only if the process is respected according to P3 who sometime uses an individual way of working and meets the goals but the managers were not satisfied because he did not follow the process. The spontaneity and approximation damages because Germans are oriented by facts. Moreover, participants describe the lack of flexibility with a lack of initiative-taking. P4 and P5 explain it through the dependence on the routine. Furthermore, P5 talk about the difficulty in the relation with German employees caused by the time factor. He correlates the relation the time that a task lasts and the money that it costs. That is why Germans do not want to take initiatives because it demands more time and consequently more cost. Another consequence is the fact that Germans speedily find solutions of a problem to spend time whereas they know it is not sustainable according to P5.

### **4.5.2. Work atmosphere**

- The team spirit

The lack of exchange between the members of the team makes the work hard according all the interviewed persons. It lacks this collegiality with German employees according P5 which P1 agrees by adding the lack of human contacts and the austere relations in comparison with the work atmosphere in France. P4 tells he does not have contacts with his colleagues after work. P3 notes the lack of unformal relation with German colleagues which means to eat out during the lunch break. Moreover, the use of humour which can bring people closer is difficult with German people who do not understand some forms of humour as irony or off-beat humour according to P1 and P2. Furthermore, Germans are not in favour of the purpose of teamwork according to P5. This idea

is justified by P5 who talks about the no-interest from his German colleagues for the achievement of a task together.

- The behaviours

Concerning the German behaviour at work, the participants meet difficulties. They find it difficult to develop a dialogue with Germans in particular because Germans do not express their opinions verbally and non-verbally at the present moment according to P2. They will send an email afterwards. Some participants describe the Germans' reaction as "poker face". Moreover, participants consider this lack of openness by Germans as a difficulty which makes the communication complicated according to P5 who adds Germans are not patient to listen and do not want to change and improve their opinions. It is a major difficulty because it is necessary to insist and fight to be understood. Another difficulty is the frequency of criticism according to P4 which P5 agrees by explaining Germans constantly try to contradict or find arguments against.

#### **4.5.3. The lack of intercultural understanding**

The lack of cultural understanding from Germans is related by the interviewed persons. Germans do not understand the cultural difference in terms of the way of thinking or working according to P3. P2 explains it is less difficult with his German colleagues who are multicultural. Germans close themselves before a cultural misunderstanding because they are not able to understand it according to P3. Moreover, they have difficulties in the understanding of cultural difference like in the process of introducing a product on a foreign market because they are convinced by their way of working. That is why they have a lack of adaption or openness for other culture.

#### **4.5.4. Foreign languages**

The interviewed persons use foreign languages as German, English or French at work and meet some difficulties with them in terms of expressing their opinions for instance. Moreover, the lack of linguistic skills for the German language is a significant difficulty for the informal communication according to P1. Moreover, the fact that expatriates do not speak German at a native-speaker level is a difficulty in terms of legitimacy according to P3 what P4 agrees by adding they are not taken seriously by Germans especially because of their accent. P3 describes it as language discrimination because Germans do not listen to him. P4 is subject to comment or jokes concerning his accent and feels stu-

pid because he does some mistakes in German. Furthermore, the participants mention the difficulty for phone conversations. They face to difficulties for understanding the other interlocutor and the lack of non-verbal communication provokes a difficulty in the process of understanding the reactions of the other person according to P4.

#### **4.6. Expatriate expectations**

The words from the interviewed persons reveal some expectations from the expatriate regarding German colleagues. Certain participants (P4 and P5) express their expectations in terms of way of working. They expect more initiatives at work and are disappointed of the lack of imitative taking from German. P4 would like more creativity in the tasks. Moreover, P1 and P2 expect of the contribution to more seriousness and discipline from their German colleagues. Furthermore, three participants (P2, P4 et P5) expect more team spirit in terms of collegiality and mutual aid. P2 and P4 expect more help for the accomplishment of their task. Another expectation is the wish that Germans understand better the notion of team spirit and consequently they work together and depend on each other. Four participants (P1, P2, P3 and P5) have expectations concerning the relations with their German colleagues. They would like to have more human contacts according to P1 and more informal contacts. In the same way, P3 wishes the work atmosphere would be more relaxed what P5 agrees adding the looking for more collegiality and empathy. P3 adds the wish of more openness regarding German employees. The last point is a cultural expectation from the expatriate in terms of cultural understanding. They expect of German that they try to understand better the cultural difference.

#### **4.7. Possible improvement**

This subchapter presents proposals of possible improvements according to the participants in order to improve the relation between German employees and expatriates at work. Firstly, P2 recommends more liberty in the communication in order to facilitate the exchanges and the work within a team. Moreover, P5 suggests the use of example to express ideas and the use of written form to repeat the words after a phone conversation. Secondly, P4 and P5 explain the necessity to have intercultural teams composed of German employees and expatriates in order to avoid some comments and jokes about the accent for instance. And, P5 finds it important to develop dependence between the members of a team through tasks through the development of teambuilding although he



tried it and it was not working. Thirdly, the most participants reveal the importance of the cultural sensitisation which can develop through formations. It would avoid some misunderstandings between the members. P2 explains that it is developed in his enterprise and it helps to understand easier the cultural difference. Moreover, it is necessary to train the manager on the cultural aspect in terms of cultural differences in the way of working who work with an intercultural team. P4 proposes to develop exchanges with enterprise abroad in order to understand how foreigners work and to learn another foreign language. About the language learning, P1 suggests developing the language tandem in the enterprise.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This chapter answers the research questions. It is vital to understand these following interpretations coming from the perception of the interviewed persons who work with German employees.

### **5.1. German behaviour in a working environment**

#### **5.1.1. Importance of the facts**

- Professionalism

The professionalism is a cultural character trait which the participants mention, Schroll-Machl presents in the literature. Germans optimize their work time in order to accomplish the task. Schroll-Machl talks about the priority for the tasks. The employees should be productive and exploit this work time. Moreover, the participants considered the German professional culture as result-oriented culture which demands pragmatism in the same way that the cultural dimension from Hofstede which considers the German culture as individualist and the idea from Schroll-Machl who explains it through the German employees concentrating on their responsibilities and tasks. These are obligations defined by their position (Dahrendorf, 2006, p. 37). According to the participants, the rationality in the German behaviour is omnipresent and they do not show emotions as Schroll-Machl mentions and adds as well that Germans get to the point. It consequently influences the relation with their colleagues. The main priority is the work itself. That is why the social contact is subordinate. The participants reveal the use of jokes is not recommended at work.

- The use of documents

The interviews mention that Germans constantly use written documents as protocols, reports or emails in order to diffuse information and check on one hand the information has been received and understood and on the other hand as protection against potential litigations or problems. This role of the use of detailed documentation is presented by Schroll-Machl in the literature as a recurrent tool in everyday professional life of German employees. For example, one of the participants states that his phone conversations are generally recapped in a report. Moreover, the interviewed persons explain the efficiency of this documentation in order to present their ideas and convince Germans. Schroll-Machl confirms this by adding that Germans are always prepared for a meeting with documentations because they consider it as convincing to have arguments and a source of reliability. P1 describes the report as “bullet point” in German. That is to say a list of key words expressing ideas. Improvisation is not a good way to convince Germans because it is considered as not rational and not precise.

- The expertise

Germans give a significant importance at the expertise according to the participants. That is to say that they are attentive for experts who are specialised and qualified in a specific area. In the literature it is explained that Germans think positively of experts (Schroll-Machl). One of the participants says that many colleagues are experts in their area and know it in a detailed manner. The status of expert expects the person of responsibilities and a certain behaviour which he has to adopt (Dahrendorf, 2006, p. 37). This expertise is in correlation with the fact aspect because it means that it excludes the improvisation which Germans do not value according to the participants. German employees only use the improvisation in case of an emergency where the problem is too serious and a solution has to be found rather fast according to Schroll-Machl.

### **5.1.2. The process in Germany as factor of inflexibility**

- The respect of the process and its rules

Four of the participants explain the rules regulate the functioning of the German work which manifest to the respect of rules as Schroll-Machl described in the literature through the importance of the “contract” considered by German as a security and an insurance. One of the participants (P5) tells only the written rules in a contract are tacit; the rules outside the contract are not taken into account although they can facilitate the

project progress because they have no legitimacy. The regulation of rules through the contract aims to avoid uncertainty and develop trust between the members of the team and are perceived as expectations and obligations which have to be respected in order to avoid conflicts (Dahrendorf). Moreover, the job description which describes all the tasks and responsibilities from an employee has a significant role in Germany according to the participants. Germans follow it and it is expected to accomplish the tasks of this job description in time. In the literature, this job description is considered as a sort of contract which coordinates the actions of employees according to the perception of participants and the respect of the job description is perceived as professionalism according to Schroll-Machl. Furthermore, the literature is in correlation with the participants about the respect of rules in Germany. Germans are responsible for their missions which is assumed rigorously. These responsibilities are obligations (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 97) which can be sanctioned (Dahrendorf, 2006, p. 50) if they are not respected. In addition, the role of the hierarchy influences the decision making in Germany. Germans constantly need to refer it to their supervisor in order to take a decision. It is a necessity of insurance.

- A lack of flexibility

As a consequence of this attachment for the respect of rules and the job description, the Germans are not flexible at work. They are considered by participants as much less spontaneous. This lack of flexibility definitely contradicts the Hofstede's idea which describes German employees as flexible through his cultural dimensions. However, the idea of the interviewed persons is agreed by Schroll-Machl which explains the German employees need to control every detail in the implementation and progress of actions in order to insure his success and avoid potential problems. This professionalism makes Germans inflexible and less spontaneous accordingly. Certain participants describe the lack of flexibility as a way of avoiding new responsibilities and the wish of keeping this dependence of the routine. That is why they do not take initiatives. According to Schroll-Machl, the lack of flexibility is caused by this necessity of referring to the hierarchy for a decision making. Not to respect a rule splits the trust between the members according to Schroll-Machl which the participants mention as well. In one single case, they demonstrate flexibility if the procedure can be used and respected because the work method is known and clear. As a last point, the role of the job description on the German flexibility is strong because this description influences the decision making and

actions from German employees insofar as they respect this description and are not responsible for more tasks (Schroll-Machl).

### **5.1.3. Strict professional relations**

All the participants describe relations with Germans at work as strictly professional and oriented on the work with which Schroll-Machl agrees by adding the German employees categorically separate the professional aspect and the private aspect. The participants tell they have no relation from their work that develops friendship and there is a certain austerity in the relation with German employees. Schroll-Machl explains the relationship with Germans at work develops through the competences and they do not look for new friendships with their colleagues. Influenced by the priority of tasks, Schroll-Machl adds the social contacts are in the background. That is why the discussion topics focus on the work and Germans do not know their colleagues personally according to Schroll-Machl. As a consequence, one participant (P3) mentions the lack of relaxation in the relation.

Interestingly, one of participants (P3) notes the efficacy from Germans in the process of developing their professional network. This idea is not mentioned in the literature. Moreover, an aspect exposed by participants which contradicts the literature is about the use of humour. Schroll-Machl describes the humour facilitates the contacts and is often used by Germans. However, the participants demonstrate the difficulty of using humour with Germans because they do not understand irony and off-beat humour which is damaging.

Moreover, the formal aspect is omnipresent according to several participants who note the lack of human contacts. One of the participants tells he would not address a personal problem with German colleagues. Consequently, informal contacts are very rare according to Schroll-Machl who adds the personal aspect has no importance in a working environment in Germany. However, two participants (P2 and P4) describe it the other way around. Indeed, P2 is close to his colleagues with whom he can organise some activities in his free-time.

#### **5.1.4. The role of the time aspect**

The time factor considered as « symbol value » (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 54) is vital in Germany and characterised by the efficacy, the respect of work time and a lack of flexibility.

- The notion “Kosten-Nutzen-Überlegung“ or „reflection-benefit-cost“

One of the participants (P5) mentions the relation of Germans between money and time which is composed of three elements: “reflection, benefit and cost. He justifies the lack of initiative taking by Germans through the fact that the reflection of a new initiative causes a financial loss. In the literature, this notion is mentioned by Schroll-Machl who explains that time is precious and valuable for Germans and consequently time is worth the money. Germans constantly evaluate the implantation of a new idea or project in terms of rentability. That is to say the calculation of the necessary reflects time with the cost and the benefit.

- Efficacy

Time is vital in Germany, it is necessary to manage time with efficiency in order to be very productive according to the participants. Germans try to accomplish the most of tasks during their work schedule. The aim is to reduce the tasks in to-do-lists as fast as possible. Efficacy is the key word and is demonstrated by the punctuality for the task realisation. In the literature, Schroll-Machl mentions this aspect of the punctuality through the respect of deadline considered by Germans as a mark of reliability which is going to develop the trust between the members. She adds they plan ahead provisional timetable in detail. Moreover, participants describe the German professional culture as culture of efficiency which is manifested as a good time management in the communication for instance. Indeed, the German way of communicating is fast, accurate, efficient and pragmatic as Schroll-Machl characterises it in the literature. She explains they get to their point and they care about the respect of the time given by meetings.

- The lack of flexibility

Time influences the level of German flexibility according to the participants who explain that Germans focus on the respect of the procedure and do not take initiatives accordingly. Moreover, the lack of flexibility is manifested as lack of adaption in terms of work methods according to P3 who tells this lack of adaption by introducing a product on the French market without doing cultural adaptation. This lack of flexibility is men-

tioned by Schroll-Machl who describes German employees through the lack of spontaneity. They regulate their actions through the procedure and the appointment. They find the spontaneity disruptive and inappropriate according to Schroll-Machl. Furthermore, German enterprises do not take time to train their new employees on the work methods and enterprise culture. The new employees just get basic information about the work methods and German employees do not lend their support to these new employees. Schroll (Schroll-Machl, 2016, pp. 134-135), is in accordance with the participants and describes the importance of the notion “priorisieren” or “have priorities” which means the accomplishment of tasks and the lack of attention for training programme.

- The word schedules

The word schedules are determined and delimited over time. There are frequently policies concerning the word schedule in German enterprises according to the most participants. It is vital to respect this punctuality in terms of schedule. Schroll-Machl agrees by explaining the importance of the notion “time management” and the respect of schedules. The no-respect is perceived by Germans very negatively (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 131). The participants talk about the “typical Germans” to not remain at work after the obligatory time. Moreover, the participants explain the lunch break is not separated from the work obligations and is often planned with some goals as meetings with partners from other services in order to negotiate ideas or develop relations. One of the participants (P1) mentions the non-existence of the coffee break as real break in Germany. The meaning of coffee break in German is the action to go to take a coffee and directly come back to the office. According to Schroll-Machl, the goal of the lunch break is very often professional. That is to say to meet managers from other services or other enterprises in order to inform about projects and to negotiate (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 130).

## **5.2. German behaviour in the communication**

### **5.2.1. Characteristics of the German way for communicating**

- Direct and efficient communication

All participants describe the German way for communication as direct, efficient as well as pragmatic. They get to the point and express themselves clearly, accurately and fast. This directness is mentioned by Hofstede through the cultural dimension about individualism (Hofstede, n.d.). Schroll-Machl agrees with the German cultural standard and

adds the explicit character of the German communication through clear and accurate words (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 29). The efficiency and pragmatism are cultural characters of the German way for communicating (Kilian, 2015, p. 11) which should remain formal. Moreover, one of participants (P1) perceives the German communication as a “bullet points” communication. That is to say Germans succinctly express themselves through ideas developed point by point. Furthermore, participants explain Germans cut the other off speaking in order to express their opinions which Schroll-Machl understands as the determination of Germans for broadcasting a message (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 30). However, this directness depends on the context according to one of participants (P5) who explains Germans do not speak directly about their private life.

- A structured argumentation

The argumentation has a significant importance in order to express ideas and convince in Germany. It is vital to prepare and structure arguments. They need to get to the point according to Schroll-Machl. It links to the German cultural standard about the importance of facts. The argumentation has to be structured and justified by written documentations which are considered as reliable evidence according to the participants and Schroll-Machl. Participants explain Germans do not pay attention for the improvisation accordingly.

- Criticism-oriented communication

According to the participants, the criticism is present in the communication and sometimes without a real reason. Germans frequently complain about functioning problems in the enterprise. The contradiction seems to be a communicative character trait for Germans what Schroll-Machl justifies by their perception of the criticism as a mark of intelligence and competence (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 185). Moreover, participants explain the directness during conflicts. Germans express their criticisms with directness and frankness according to Schroll-Machl. P1 tells they criticise the ideas but not the person. However, the literature describes the confrontation oriented on the ideas and the persons (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 181). P4 agrees with his example by meeting during which Germans directly criticise their colleagues.

- A manifest lack of openness

The words of the most participants contradict the literature. The participants describe Germans as narrow-minded concerning new ideas. Germans do not accept different

opinions, they insist on their ideas and do not want to reflect about other ideas. Two of the participants reveal Germans are not attentive to words from their colleagues and it is necessary to insist and fight in order to express his opinions make yourself heard what it is yet described by Brownell as necessary for a successful communication (Brownell 1996, in Röhner & Schütz, 2016, p. 85). It definitely contradicts the literature which describes Germans as being attentive to the other in particular through a participative communication (Schroll-Machl). However, this idea is controversial within the participants. One of participants explains the use of participative communication during meetings where each employee can express his ideas what Hofstede describes through his cultural dimensions (Hofstede, n.d.). Schroll adds this form of communication is used to exchange decisions making during meetings. Moreover, this lack of openness manifests as the big difficulties of Germans for understanding the cultural differences in terms of behaviour. P3 talk about narrow-mindedness.

### **5.2.2. Appearance**

According to the participants, the appearance plays an essential role for German employees who keep a pride in terms of reactions and knowledges. They want to keep a good image during conflicts or exchanges of views for instance. They remain friendly, polite and “in Ordnung” with each other. The literature explains Germans hide their uncertainty through the appearance according to Schroll-Machl. It manifests with a great self-confidence. Moreover, they control their emotions because emotions are considered by them as a weakness and show nothing although they disagree or are annoyed (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 147). The participants explain Germans do not say what they really think in order to keep a good image and meet after the person to complain. One of participants (P3) perceives it as hypocrisy which contradicts the literature (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 172) and the words from Krause who describes the German communication as direct and based on sincerity and frankness<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, concerning discussion topics for which they do not have knowledges, they rapidly change the topic in order not to show their lack of knowledge about this which can be interpreted as a weakness.

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to the expert interview (08:54-12 :10, Birnbaum- and Krause, Experteninterview, 09.06.2017).



### **5.2.3. Communication tools**

According to the participants, the use of email conversations is very common in a working environment in Germany because it enables to diffuse and transmit information and tasks for instance. The literature justifies the omnipresence of email conversations in everyday professional life as the main activity (Incelli, 2008, p. 115). Moreover, Germans communicate by email with a colleague in the same room in order to avoid interrupting what Incelli explains too. Furthermore, Germans use every day online tools as online to-do-list which is accessible for all members of the team according to two participants (P2 and P4).

The phone communication seems inefficient as the literature mentioned (Incelli, 2008, p. 115). The use of foreigner language makes the quality of the exchange complicated in terms of understanding. In addition, P4 explains the difficulty created by the lack of non-verbal communication which avoid the interlocutors to observe if the reactions of the person and consequentiy created an uncertainty as Schugk describes in the litterature too (Schugk, 2014, pp. 151-152).

The last point is the rare use of Smalltalk in Germany according to the participant. Schroll-Machl has the same observations. She explains Germans avoid the meta-communication through Smalltalk because they consider it as a waste of time (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 56) whereas this role is vital in the development of relation in a intercultural context (Carpentier, Demorgon, Lenhard, & Müller, 2014, pp. 170-171).

### **5.2.4. The role of the accent**

Three participants show the role of the accent in the behaviour of Germans. This aspect is not mentioned in the literature. In the communication, the foreign accent of non-native speakers communicating in German influences Germans who seem not to take seriously the words of the non-native speakers. The second reason is the fact non-native speakers do not speak flawless German. Germans seem to consider these people as less cultivated according to P4. P1 considers a form of language discrimination developed by Germans what P3 completes as a loss of legitimacy caused by the foreign accent. Moreover, Germans laugh at the accents through commenting and jokes about the way of speaking from expatriates.

In the literature Incelli yet mentions the pronunciation and the interferences of the mother tongue as communication problems (Incelli, 2008, p. 115). Moreover, Plewnia

et Rothe reveal how foreign accents influence Germans in terms of contacts and estimation from the other (Plewnia & Rothe, 2011, pp. 215-253).

### **5.3. Difficulties encountered by expatriates in working environment with German**

#### **5.3.1. Work atmosphere**

The expatriates have difficulties like the lack of team spirit and the collegiality. German employees are not disposed to work as a team. The most participants mention austere relations with their German colleagues which manifests as a lack of human contacts. There is a lack of dialogue and they do not know each other personally. Moreover, some participants describe the discussions as no-constructive because Germans are not attentive and lack patience to listen to the other as well as there is a real narrow-mindedness from Germans during the discussions. That is why it is perceived as a big difficulty for expatriates. The literature can explain this difficulty in the behaviour of Germans through different points as this relation is oriented by the professionalism in Germany and the task aspect which means that the function of the work time is to work. That is why the time at work is not destined to develop human contacts for German employees. Moreover, the expatriate finds this recurrent contradictory spirit difficult in the discussions. Furthermore, this very serious and formal atmosphere makes the work conditions difficult according to the participants who would like to have more relaxation at work. Furthermore, the humour mostly lacks in the expatriate. They explain it is difficult to joke around with Germans. The use of irony and off-beat humour is impossible because Germans understand it very rarely. It contradicts the literature which tells Germans like using humour to relax the atmosphere according to Schroll-Machl. However, few studies deal with this topic about humour and the way of using humour for instance. In addition, expatriates meet difficulties with the important role of the appearance in Germany. Germans do not express in public what they think what P3 considers as hypocrisy. They keep a good image. Participants consequently describe a lack of explanations and clarifications of the expectations. It can be manifested as the importance of the emotional control which is vital for Germans at work. Germans distrust their colleagues to avoid that these use it in situations of concurrence for instance (Schroll-Machl, 2016, p. 145).

### **5.3.2. The way of working**

In the way of working with Germans, the participants insist of the lack of flexibility. This rigidity in the respect of the procedure and rules gives no room to operate and is considered as the real difficulty according to the participants. The goals have to be attained through the respect of the procedure. In spite of their adaptation to the German work methods, expatriates meet difficulties due to certain cultural differences. Moreover, the lack of initiative taking disturbs the expatriates. This dependence on the routine is not right for them. Furthermore, the use of written documentation to legitimate their tasks is perceived as a difficulty.

### **5.3.3. Intercultural understanding**

Expatriates note strong difficulties in the cultural understanding with Germans, in particular with whom they have no intercultural competencies because they are not aware of cultural differences. Birnbaum-Crowson adds the relations are easier with people having intercultural experiences. Moreover, they struggle with the integration of the German culture which is describes by P5 as very complex. Indeed, P5 observes many different ways of behaviour. Furthermore, there is this recurrent comparison of other culture with the German culture and this lack of understanding regarding behaviour differences from the other cultures. In addition, the most participants develop the idea that Germans are not aware of cultural differences in terms of behaviour and thinking what is a significant difficulty for expatriate because it constantly requires reminding them the differences. The lack of understanding is manifested as a lack of adaptation in terms of work methods as during the introduction of products on a foreign market. Krause mentions the huge importance of this sensibilization of the culture from the other as well as the knowledge about the other culture.

### **5.3.4. The use of foreign languages**

Expatriates have difficulties with the German language during informal conversations with their colleagues. Indeed, some participants describe this lack of clarity and precision in their words because of a lack of linguistic skills what has as consequence a difficulty for drawing the attention to Germans. This difficulty is perceived by P3 as language discrimination and a loss of credibility caused by the foreign accent too. The literature mentions the same idea about this difficulty for expressing opinions and ideas in a foreign language (Incelli, 2008, p. 115). Germans take people with a foreign accent

less seriously and do some jokes or comments about it according to the participants. As mentioned aforesaid, foreign accents influence the behaviour of Germans. Moreover, the most participants reveal difficulties during phone conversations manifested by a certain uncertainty due to the non-verbal communication gap.

## **5.4. Expectations in an intercultural work team**

### **5.4.1. Expectations from Germans**

In correlation with the German cultural standard from Schroll-Machl, Germans expect expatriate of the realisation of their tasks in time. Moreover, they expect that expatriates respect the procedure and rules and do not take initiatives. Concerning the time management Germans expect the punctuality. In addition, Germans have expectation in terms of cultural behaviours. It is about the “game of cultures” based on the clichés. That is to say expatriates must show on one hand some cultural character traits “typically German” as the directness in the communication and on the other hand clichés from their own culture. This “game of cultures” helps to relax the atmosphere. Interestingly, the two experts Birnbaum-Crowson and Krause mention their expectations regarding German employees and expatriates are similar. They talk about expectations in terms of interest for the work, the German culture and the corporate culture. However, they do not expect expatriate behaviour as German.

### **5.4.2. Expectations from expatriates**

The interviewed persons have expectations concerning the way of working. They expect more team spirit, mutual aid, support as well as understanding about the notion of team of Germans. Moreover, they expect more initiative takings from their German colleagues and more flexibility in the realisation of tasks.

Furthermore, expatriates have expectations in terms of relations with their German colleagues. They want to have more collegiality through personal contacts. That is to say more informal exchanges which is essential for the teamwork. Moreover, they expect more understanding and openness about the cultural differences from the German employees as explained by P3.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study is a qualitative analysis about the professional relations in an intercultural environment composed of German employees and expatriates. In this context, it is about the characteristics of the German behaviour at work. Moreover, the study answers the difficulties of expatriates in the collaboration with German employees on a daily basis. Furthermore, it reveals certain expectations from Germans regarding the expatriates as well as those from expatriates regarding to their German colleagues in a professional context.

Several aspects from the literature which present the Germans employees are used as basis in order to describe the typical German behaviour in terms of reactions and communication at work. Many of these aspects are mentioned by the interviewed persons. From the literature and the interviews, it is possible to describe the “typical German” in a professional and intercultural environment. Firstly, Germans are very professional at work. They consider their work and tasks as obligations for which they are responsible. The facts are essential in Germany and manifest as the necessity for the realisation of tasks in time. This importance of facts goes through the use of documentations in order to justify ideas or accomplished missions. The expertise plays a significant role in Germany which is considered as a real culture of results and efficiency. Secondly, this German professionalism is based on the respect of procedure and rules. It is vital because the results are only appreciated if the procedure is respected which yet reveals an inflexibility according to the participants. Thirdly, the work atmosphere is based on professional and formal relations centred on the work. The human contacts are rarely consequently because the work is the priority according to Schroll-Machl. The use of Smalltalk, considered by German as a waste of time, is used very rarely although the literature mentions it as essential because it helps to develop the relation in an intercultural environment. Interestingly, one of participants reveals the faculty of Germans for developing their professional network. This point is not mentioned in the literature. Concerning the use of humour, the participants do not agree with the literature. In the literature, the Germans seems to frequently use the humour in order to relax the atmosphere but the interviewed persons express real difficulties for the use of humour with Germans at work because Germans do not understand some forms of humour as irony or off-beat-humour and the work place is not the place for joking. Fourthly, the time management is vital for German employees who manage it efficiently. As a conse-

quence, they are not flexible and do not take initiatives as the literature mentions too. Fifthly, the last point about the German behaviour at work is the communication behaviour. The German communication is direct, efficient and pragmatic. This directness is often mentioned. However, it is differently described according to the context and influenced by the appearance and the discussion topics. Indeed, it is vital in Germany to keep a good image. It manifests as a control of emotions what the participants perceive as a lack of frankness. Germans don't express in public what they think. This point contradicts the literature and the words from Krause. Some participants describe it as a hypocrisy developed in Germany. However, lot of characteristics about the communication correlate the words from the participants with the literature. The German communication is based of an structured argumentation and oriented to the contradiction and complaint. Moreover, participants reveal a lack of open-mindedness by Germans. Concerning the communication tools, they principally use the email conversations and the use of online to-do-list. Finally, it is important to note that foreign accents influence the German behaviour regarding to the expatriates. Some participants explain Germans do not take them seriously due to their accent and their way of speaking which is not typical German.

About the difficulties from expatriates working with Germans, participants reveal four main aspects: the work atmosphere, the way of working, the lack of intercultural understanding and the use of foreign languages. Firstly, participants struggle with the lack of flexibility which is imposed by this respect of rules and procedure, the dependence on the routine. The recurrent use of documentations to legitimate the accomplished task is complicated for the expatriates. Secondly, the lack of understanding of cultural differences is a significant difficulty. Germans do not understand these differences in terms of way of working and thinking. Thirdly, the use of foreign language is a real difficulty as the literature mentions too. It causes problems in informal discussion for communicating and to express ideas. In addition, the foreign accent makes the collaboration difficult because it influences the German behaviour. Moreover, expatriates have difficulties in terms of understanding and lack of non-verbal communication during phone conversations.

Concerning the expectations from Germans and expatriates, it often corresponds to the cultural standards from Schroll-Machl. Germans expect the expatriate of the task realisation through the respect of the rules and procedures. Moreover, the time management

is vital and expected by German employees. Finally, Germans have expectations concerning to the cultural behaviour in terms of clichés. That is to say they expect that expatriates behaviour according to the typical German clichés and but their own cultural clichés too in the same time which one of participants calls “game of cultures”. About the expectations from expatriates, the most important aspect is the orientation of the relation with their German colleagues. It should manifest as more personal contacts and more open-mindedness in particular about the understanding of cultural differences. They expect that Germans understand there are significant cultural differences in terms of way of working and thinking. Moreover, another expectation is about the way of working in Germany. They would like to have more flexibility in the accomplishment of the tasks and more team spirit.

Another important point to mention is the limits of the study. It would be relevant to complete this study with a quantitative analysis through an online survey for instance which would be based on the result of this qualitative analysis in order to make generalisations. Moreover, as explained in the method part, an anomaly occurred during the interview with P5. Two questions were inversed. It could be it influenced the answers of P5.

This study reveals the relevance of the cultural awareness which can manifest as trainings about the cultural differences in terms of professional behaviours and cultural ways of thinking as Krause and the participants mentioned. Moreover, it is vital to set up solutions in order to reduce the linguistic difficulties through online linguistic trainings. Furthermore, it seems necessary to adjust some aspects concerning the way of working in Germany and to give more flexibility through more rooms of manoeuvre for employees in the accomplishment of actions. It can manifest as a participative communication before the beginning of the actions. The last point is the orientation of the relations between colleagues. In order to keep the motivation of expatriates, it is essential for Germans to develop human contacts and give more liberty in the informal discusses.

The results let some interrogations which could analyse. The notion of tolerance mentioned by Krause could be relevant for the improvement of intercultural relations. The tolerance is perceived differently between the cultures. Krause qualifies the notion of tolerance as an invitation from Western Europe countries and as the biggest difficulty in an intercultural environment. A research about the perception of the tolerance between cultures of different continents can help to be more aware of some behaviours. Moreo-

ver, it would be interesting to deepen the expectations from German employees in contact with foreigners in order to give some instructions for foreigners who will work with German. In a similar way, it would be important to deepen the expectations of people working in intercultural teams in order to disclose universal characteristics about professional expectations which could help for the managing of intercultural teams.