# Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

# Faculty of Economics and Management

# Department of Management

**Bachelor thesis**

**Working in a multicultural environment**

**Tomáš Petr**

**! ! !**

**In this place, please insert
the Diploma Thesis Assignment.
(The original goes into one thesis
and the copy into the other)**

**! ! !**

**Declaration**

I declare that I have worked on my bachelor thesis titled Working in a multicultural environment by myself and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis.

In Prague on 31$^{st}$ March 2010          _____

Tomáš Petr

**Acknowledgement**

# Working in a multicultural environment

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# Pracovní působení v multikulturním prostředí

**Summary:**

The primary aim of this Bachelor thesis is to discover the main issues connected with the matter of working in a multicultural environment. Particularly to understand how people perceive different cultures in the working process and how the culture can influence them. The theoretical part of this work is divided into several chapters describing the aspects of this phenomenon and other things connected to it. In order to introduce the reader to the dilemma, all the necessary definitions and theories are stated. Further on one the most known theories is discussed – the theory of five cultural dimensions introduced by Geert Hofstede who is already for several decades considered to be the most reputable scientist in this field. Moreover the importance of cross-cultural communication is stressed as well as the ability to negotiate in this environment. The main sources of all the necessary information are in most of the cases scientific and specialized literature.

The empirical part of this thesis is dedicated to the research in this field of study. The primary data were collected by means of in-depth questionnaires spread among people with certain working experience in different culture. The aim of the inquiry is to understand which role the culture plays in the working process as well as in everyday life, particularly which difficulties can occur or which abilities are needed to be successful and able to "survive" in the multicultural environment.


**Keywords:** multicultural environment, Hofstede, cultural dimensions, globalization, national culture, organizational culture,  culture shock, cross-cultural communication, language, working experience

**Souhrn:**

Základním cílem této práce je pochopit veškeré aspekty spojené s pracovním působením v multikulturním prostředí. Zejména jak lidé vnímají rozlišnost kultur na pracovišti a jak je dané kultury mohou ovlivnit. Teoretická část je rozdělena do několika kapitol popisujících prvky této problematiky a věci s ní spojené. Za účelem uvedení čtenáře do této problematiky jsou uvedeny veškeré potřebné definice a základní teorie. Dále je rozebrána právě jedna z nejznámějších teorií - kulturní dimenze od Geerta Hofsteda, pravděpodobně nejuznávanějšího vědce zkoumající danou problematiku již několik desetiletí. V neposlední řadě se v této práci pojednává o důležitosti interkulturní komunikace a schopnostech v tomto prostředí vyjednávat. Informace pro tuto část byly čerpány z odborné literatury.

Praktická část je věnována výzkumu spojeného s tímto tématem. Jedná se o získávání praktických informací pomocí dotazníků rozšířených mezi lidi se zkušenostmi s pracovním působením v zahraničí, potažmo s odlišnou kulturou. Cílem tohoto výzkumu je odhalit jakou roli hraje kultura v běžném pracovním procesu i mimo něj, zejména jaké problémy jsou spojené s takovouto zkušeností či jaké vlastnosti a schopnosti jsou zapotřebí pro „přežití" v multikulturním prostředí.

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**Klíčová slova:** multikulturní prostředí, Hofstede, kulturní dimenze, globalizace, národní kultura, organizační kultura, kulturní šok, interkulturní komunikace, jazyk, pracovní zkušenost

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# 1 Introduction

The introduction part will provide the reader with initial information about the main topic of this Bachelor thesis - Working in a multicultural environment. In accordance to the current situation of globalization, many companies tend to work on the multinational level. It has obviously many advantages to operate in as many countries as possible but on the other hand it automatically refers to certain demand of knowledge about those countries. And one of the basic conditions for such a kind of international confrontation is a sufficient awareness about diverse cultures.

The process of meeting different cultures is not just a matter of recent years but it is doubtlessly present during the whole history of humankind. Since early ages many tribes or nations were confronting in order to cooperate, establishing alliances or contrariwise fighting for whatever reasons. This pattern has not changed until these days. However the practices are certainly different. Each of us has for sure met with someone from another culture in his/her life and that makes the issue even more interesting and consequently important to understand. And that is the main aim of my thesis, to contribute to scientific understanding of the process of meeting diverse cultures, particularly in the world of business. The process as such looks at first sight not complicated at all, maybe the language can be possibly considered as a problem, but in a matter of fact it is a very difficult procedure. When dealing with people from diverse cultures, especially during the work, we have to be aware of so many unexpected facts and these will be presented in this work as well. At first the communication is very important but also the art of negotiation and many other aspects must be understood before we want to confront a new culture.

# 2 Objectives and Methodology

## 2.1 Objectives

One of the primary goals is to discover what working in a multicultural environment is actually about. It means which role does culture play in terms of international business. Whether it is really crucial to know a lot about the new culture or it is enough to be a good businessman without any knowledge of our different future environment, simply whether these skills are sufficient to get what we need or not. Consequently how important is the cross-culture communication and ability to negotiate.

Furthermore how we should behave in new cultural environment, what are the main aspect which should be accepted before visiting new country and thus new culture or how to accommodate to customs of foreign people. In which viewpoints should be the new culture understood, whether the values, customs or believes are more important than pure knowledge of communication with people. So the question is what all should we have to know about our potential colleagues or working partners in order to be successful in our business activities.

The aim of this work is also to understand the main differences between national and organizational culture. Which roles they play in the working environment and how much should we be aware of both of them. Whether we have to fully respect them or there is some chance to manage them.

The secondary goal is to get some real experiences from people who have ever worked abroad in different cultural environment. What were the main incentives for them to get such an experience. Furthermore which difficulties have the new environment brought and how it is possible to solve them. Simply, what are the main steps which have to be done in order to be successful in this kind of working environment.

## 2.2  Methodology

The procedures and methods which are used through the whole thesis will be mentioned and explained, especially the case study which is an in-depth questionnaire filled by foreign workers. Its structure, process of choosing the respondents, main concept and aims, validity and finally an outcome will be presented.

### 2.2.1 Qualitative or quantitative research

If I take into account that the aim of this research is not to provide the reader with lots of numbers and tables full of detail information, I chose rather qualitative method than quantitative one. The purpose of this method is to go deep into the investigated area and to understand the wider implication of it. On the other hand I can not say that I used purely qualitative approach, so it can be said that finally I decided to use a mixed method approach.

My objective was to observe the issue from as close perspective as possible and that is another reason why I chose this type of research. The idea is that my own experiences in this area are very low therefore the contribution of all the respondents on this inquiry is more than essential. It gives us a viewpoint of a real experienced worker which is certainly more valuable than any kind of statistics which could be obtained from a pure quantitative research.

Nevertheless once more it has to be said that the research is not purely qualitative. In accordance to my initial idea that I would provide the reader with several in-depth interviews with foreign workers unfortunately failed. Some of the respondents were finally not able to give me enough time for such a kind of research from several reasons. So I decided to spread 10 open ended questions among people with a working experience in different cultures. It gave me not exactly as deep answers as I previously desired nevertheless it was very valuable for me. On the other hand I can say that it

supplied me with answers which can be also quantitatively analyzed and that make the research even more interesting and valuable for all potential readers.

### 2.2.2 The in-depth questionnaire

It contains ten open ended questions concerning the working experience abroad. Mainly I wanted to explore which cultural differences played the biggest role for the respondents. In other words how they deal with those differences and consequently how they solved any difficulties. Moreover which abilities helped them to survive in the new environment and what advice would they give to potential employees applying for a job abroad / in another culture.

The questionnaire was spread through e-mail to different sort of people. Either they were colleagues of my mother or mine or they were my friends. It was not easy to find so many respondents with such a kind of working experience. However the final number of 36 people should be for this empirical part of my research enough. The respondents were working in different countries all around the world and thus meet many cultures, either the national or organizational one. I have also asked several foreigners working in Czech Republic which certainly provides me with valuable information about our culture in comparison with others. I will speak about the questionnaire in more detail further in the empirical part.

# 3 Literature review

This part is focused on the theory connected with the main topic. At first all the necessary definitions will be written down which should help the reader to make a picture of what particular terms stand for. Further on there will be summarized all the facts, terms, scientific findings etc. concerning the main issue. Subsequently these findings will be analyzed and evaluated.

## 3.1 Theory of culture

In order to understand the whole dilemma of working in multicultural environment, we must at first define the term "culture". There are basically two main definitions of this word. The first, most common, meaning is "civilization", including education, manners, arts and crafts and their products. It is the domain of a "ministry of culture"[1]. Nevertheless we will not use this meaning of culture at all. This research concerns the other meaning of the word, which is actually completely different. It refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, beliefs, values, religion, customs and mores acquired by a group of people and passed on from generation to generation. (Moran, Harris, Moran, 2007) This is the most suitable definition of the term culture used for this particular inquiry.

In Figure 1 we can see how important all the aspects of culture are in terms of individual behaviour, moreover it describes that culture has a significant impact on our assumptions, perceptions and further management behaviour.

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[1] http://www.geerthofstede.nl/page1.aspx, 5.3.2010
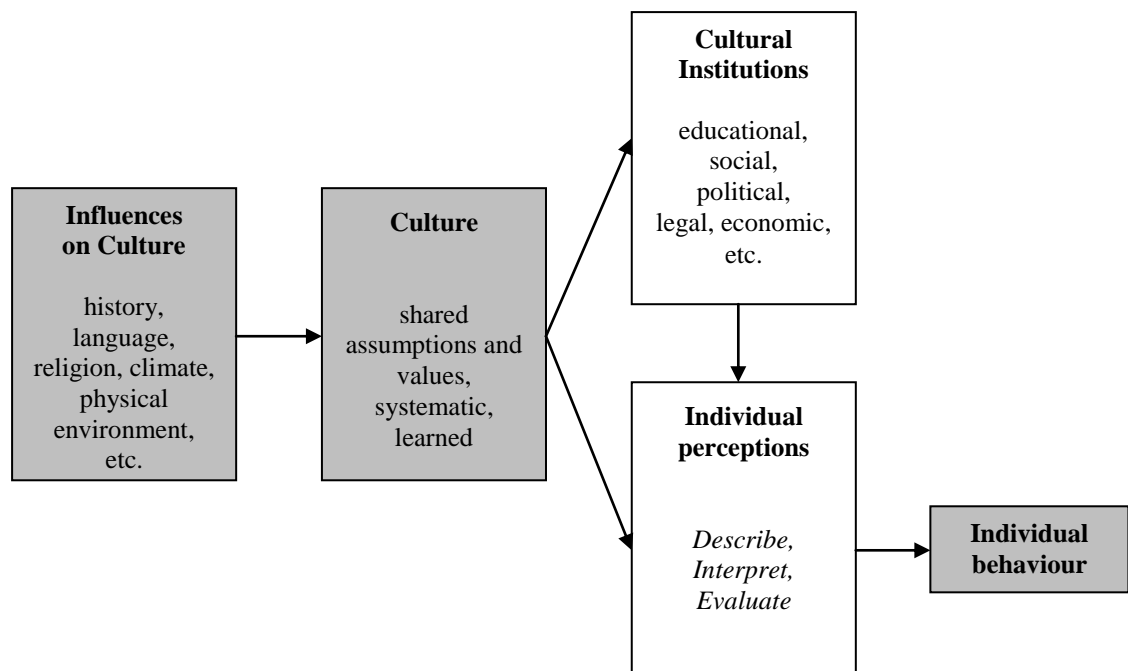
**Figure 1 -** Culture and Individual behaviour,
(H. W. LANE, J. J. DISTEFANO, M. L. MAZNEWSKI, 2006)


Today's world of business is no more only about internal matters. It is rather about global matters and ways how to manage these matters. The factors which are in fact influencing the international management (or let us say the managers as such) can be defined as economic, legal, political and cultural. The decision making is obviously determined by the first three mentioned factors (economic, political and legal) which should be definitely mastered by each international manager. However the cross-culture issue is in today's globalizing world becoming more current than ever before, perhaps because of the fact that the culture is more or less invisible in comparison to other aspects of the company's environment. (Thomas, 2008) Hence it is in many cases overlooked by the managers which could consequently lead to potential threats for the whole business.

### 3.1.1 Features of culture

Regarding many formal definitions of culture, Thomas (2008) states that it is possible to determine its three basic features. At first culture is *shared* by members of a particular group. As Hofstede (2005) emphasizes, each of us carries in his mind three levels of mental programming about the way of communication with its environment.

As wee can see on the Figure 2, culture is between human nature and human personality. The lowest level represents our basic biological wants and the highest one our unique personal characteristics. The culture is in the middle stage and this illustrates how it is neither universal, nor specific to individuals but specific to certain group - shared.
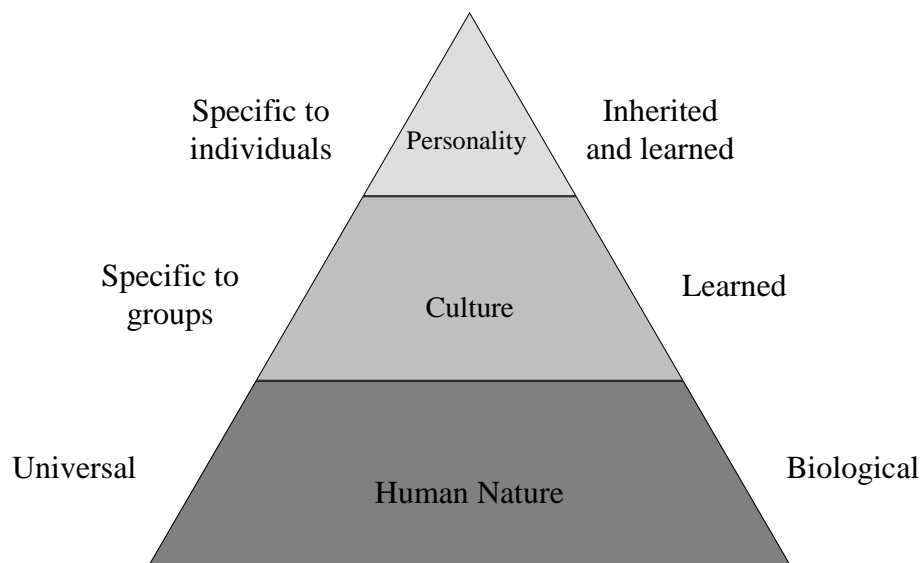
**Figure 2 -** Three levels of mental programming, (Hofstede, 2005)

Secondly culture is *learned*. It simply passes from generation to generation. We are learning it through the process of interacting with our environment since we are born. This signifies that there exists a possibility to learn cultures of different societies (Thomas, 2008) which is very important in terms of our further research.

Thirdly culture is *systematic* and *organized*. That means culture is very logical and integral unit based not just on similar customs but on secular system of values, beliefs and attitudes.

### 3.1.2 When cultures meet

One of the most important thinks concerning this issue is how the culture actually influences our behaviour which is in the field of business represented by decision making. In other words which affect could an encounter of cultures have on what are we actually doing and how are we thinking. It is said that it can have either negative or positive impact (usually leads even to so called synergy effect). Figure 3 describes the dynamics of what happens when cultures meet.
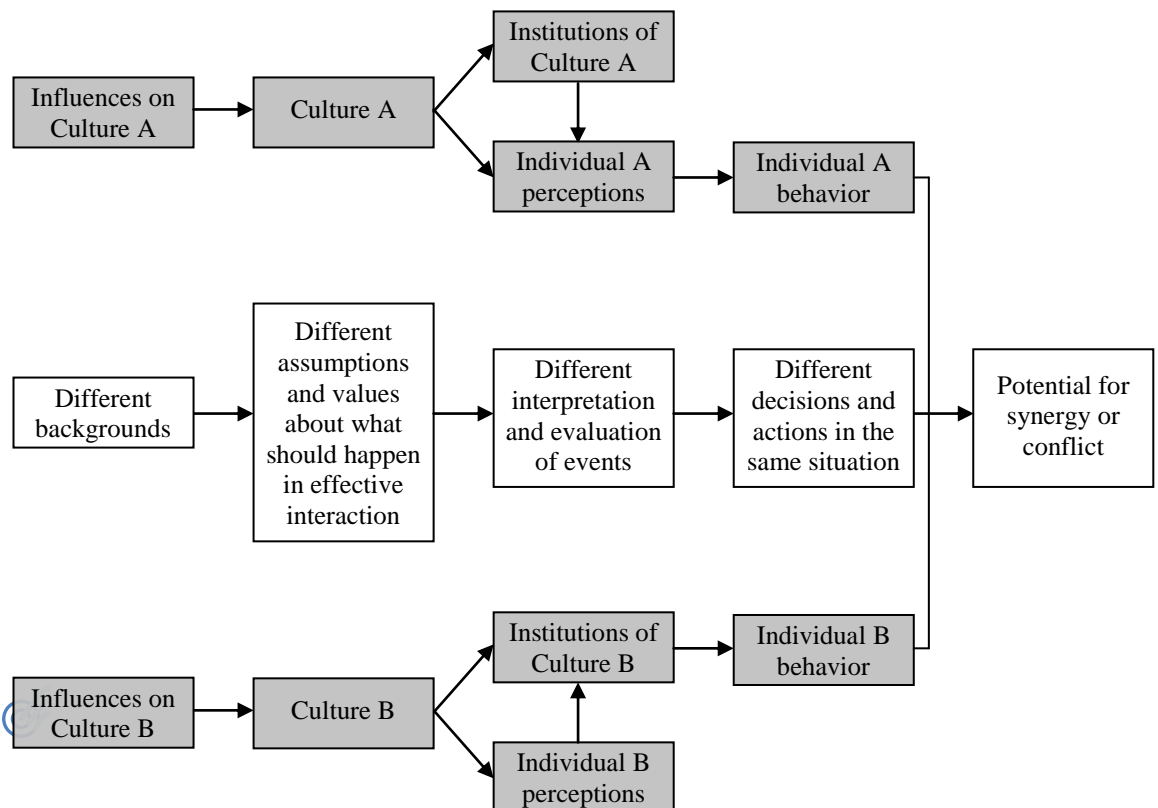


**Figure 3 -** When people from two cultures meet
(H. W. LANE, J. J. DISTEFANO, M. L. MAZNEWSKI, 2006)

### 3.1.3 Layers of culture

Even within one culture we can distinguish several layers of mental programming. Hofstede (2005) states that these layers exist in the following levels:

- *The national level*: linked to the nation as such
- *The regional level*: linked to differences in religion, ethnic origin or language within one nation
- *The gender level*: linked to differences in gender (male vs. female)
- *The generation level*: linked to differences between generation (children – parents, parents – grandparents)
- *The social class level*: linked to opportunity and level of education and differences in occupation
- *The corporate level*: linked to organizational culture. Applicable to employees within one company.

## 3.2 Globalization

Why are we interested in the matter of globalization so much during the last couple of years? Perhaps because it changes the way how we are thinking regardless of where are we from. It simply reduces the importance of borders which subsequently leads to reducing the differences in our traditions, events of our nations etc. (Mead, 2005). We simply integrates all the nations together in one globalized world which slowly but surely diminishes differences between national cultures. The best example could be a European Union in these times.

However if we consider the phenomenon of globalization from the company's point of view, it is important to have a certain level of cultural awareness. This level depends on how far the firm moves from the sole role of domestic business. Obviously the further it moves, the more it needs to understand the cultural differences.[2] On the Figure 2 we can see the extent of global involvement.

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[2] http://www.cnblogs.com/snowball/archive/2007/08/06/845275.html - 3.3.2010

Extent of handling foreign operations

High
Medium
Low

Company handles its own global operations

Other domestic firms handle external contracts

Foreign firms handle external contracts

Domestic Business

Extent of global operations

Operates integrated across different countries

Multiple foreign functions

Limited foreign functions

Quite similar    One

Moderately similar

Not at all similar

Several

Many

Degree of similiarity between home and host countries

Number of foreign countries in which a company does business

**Figure 4 -** Cultural Awareness and Extent of Global Involvement
(http://www.cnblogs.com/snowball/archive/2007/08/06/845275.html - 3.3.10)

## 3.3 Culture shock

One of the easiest and most common situations when several cultures (two or more) confront is when a foreigner comes to new cultural environment. In many cases he/she experiences so called culture shock. This term is associated with certain reactions on this new environment. As we know, our cultural characters as behaviour, customs and especially values are learned already from the childhood and thus we do not fully perceive them, the confrontation with new culture and consequently with other people having different cultural characters can many times confuse us. And because we are confused and we did not expect such a situation, we can experience a shock – culture shock. (Hofstede, 2005) In the case when we visit our new country for working purposes, the first help in order to reduce this shock should come from the company. However, the support is limited therefore we should follow several rules. At first we should learn something about the new culture in advance then we have to expect the

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occurrence of culture shock and above all we should try to understand why it occurs. (Mead, 2005)

In Figure 4 we can see how our feelings can change through the time spent at the host country. Moreover we can see how the return to our home country can be followed by so called reverse culture shock. In this situation is the time of adaptation to "new" (actually old) environment usually shorter (not obvious on the Figure 4). Nevertheless in some cases of immigrants (and others as well) it can lead to belief that their home country can no more offer sufficient conditions for way of life which they acquired abroad and therefore they immigrate once more - this time forever. (Hofstede, 2005)
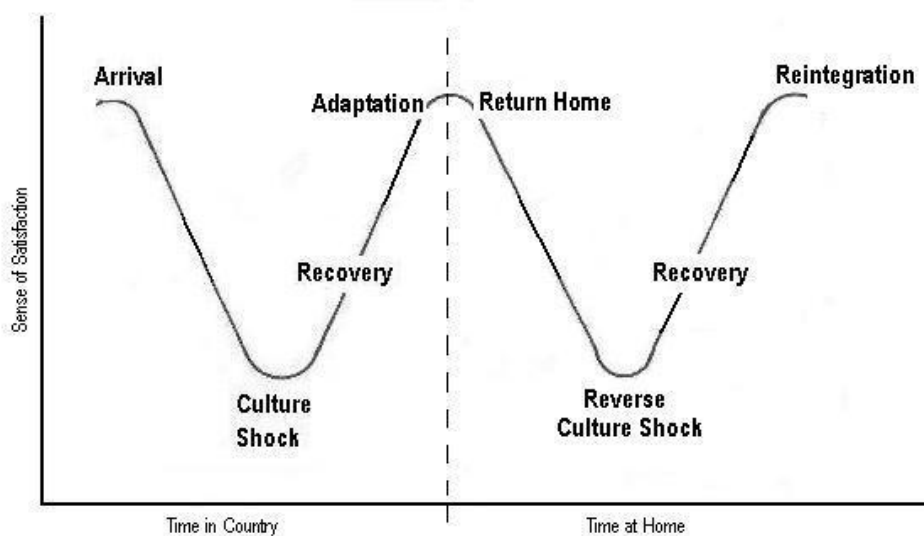


**Figure 5 -** Culture adjustment curve
(http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/Graphics/wshape1.jpg, 3.3.10)

## 3.4 Hofstede's five dimensions

Geert Hofstede is one of the best known anthropologists and sociologists who studies the field of cross-cultural communication, particularly the interactions between national and organizational cultures.

He conducted perhaps the most extensive research how culture actually influences employees in their workplace. He collected and analysed data of employee value scores between the years 1967 and 1973 in IBM Company. It covered more than 70 countries, nevertheless he used only about 50 of them and when he followed with his research later in 2001 he spread the value scores into 74 countries. According to the initial research he came up with a theory of 4 dimensions which are in fact explaining and helping to understand the differences between cultures. These are: Power Distance (PDI), Uncertainty avoidance (UAI), Individualism (IDV) and Masculinity (MAS). After Hofstede made another additional study with help of Chinese employees and managers, he added the fifth dimension: Long-term orientation (LTO) which is based on Confucian dynamism.[3]

At first let us explain why it is so crucial to understand these five dimensions. Certainly there exist many reasons why to do so, however one of the main reasons is to be aware of different cultures in the context of global cooperation. At this time there exist many global problems which are common to everybody on this planet such as political, ecological, military or economical problems. And these problems have to be somehow solved which requires a cooperation between people from the whole world. But at the same time the most of us behave, think and act completely different. So the only possible way is to understand each other in order to be able to solve these global problems. Perhaps Hofstede's five dimensions can somehow help us in the process of understanding diverse cultures and subsequently behaviour of other people.

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[3] http://www.geert-hofstede.com/geert_hofstede_resources.shtml, 3.3.2010

### 3.4.1 Power Distance

The first dimension shows how people perceive certain level of inequality. Moreover how they are able to admit the inequality in their organization. In countries where the Power Distance is large, usually there exists formal hierarchy and the ordinary employees are afraid to challenge their superiors. In other words, the boss is a real authority and this fact should be fully accepted. It leads to the situation when the subordinates are not trusted and they can be even threatened. On the other hand, in countries with small Power Distance, the superiors are benevolent to their employees and are usually open for consultations. They are much more democratic and try to look as equal to their subordinates as possible. It further means that the employees are not afraid of their bosses and potentially work without any stress.[4]

### 3.4.2 Uncertainty Avoidance

This dimension is associated with the expected and preferred level of predictability, stability and security in a society. In countries with high index of Uncertainty Avoidance there is a doubtless need for written and unwritten rules. It means that people from these countries prefer highly structured work situations where the tasks are clearly defined. Everybody knows his position, role and responsibility. Ideas and behaviours not respecting the rules are not tolerated. Furthermore the degree of anxiety is usually in such organizations higher which can result in need to work hard. By contrast in countries with weak Uncertainty Avoidance there is more willingness to take risks and uncertain situations are acceptable.[5]

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[4] http://geert-hofstede.international-business-center.com/gooderham.shtml, 7.3.2010
[5] http://geert-hofstede.international-business-center.com/gooderham.shtml, 7.3.2010

### 3.4.3 Individualism-Collectivism

The third dimension relates to the extent to which people prioritise to look after themselves and their nearest family rather than to be part of big social groups (wider family etc.). In other words, in collectivist cultures identity is based in the social system. People are born to groups and behave as part of them and moreover they take some of other's responsibilities. Family with strong relationships is very important for them. In societies where individualism is preferred, personal values play significant role. The relationships are more flexible and an independency is highlighted. In terms of organization there exists a sharp distinction between work and personal life. Task prevails over relationships and people like work settings where they can make their own decisions.[6]

### 3.4.4 Masculinity-Femininity

Discussions concerning differences between genders are definitely not rare, especially in recent years. Nevertheless the Hofstede's study shows how they differ in terms of organizations. Men usually value competitiveness, assertiveness and materialism, so money and things are important. Also performance is what counts. On the other hand women in most cases insist on harmonious relations and strong social partnership. Quality of life plays a big role as well as people and the environment around.[7] Moreover men are supposed to emphasize achievements outside their home (fishing and hunting in traditional societies and the same but in economic terms in modern societies). Women are interested rather on taking care of the home, their children and also people in general. (Hofstede, 2005)

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[6] http://geert-hofstede.international-business-center.com/gooderham.shtml, 7.3.2010
[7] http://geert-hofstede.international-business-center.com/gooderham.shtml, 7.3.2010

### 3.4.5 Long-Term Orientation

This dimension was added to the previous four in order to understand the difference in thinking between the East and West. New value scores were made by Chinese scholars because the old ones did not cover this difference at all. They were finally distributed to 23 countries. The main differences are that in the Long-term orientation people are focused mainly on future so they respect characteristics like perseverance and thrift.  In opposite, in Short-term orientation people are oriented to the past and present, particularly they respect traditions and trying to fulfil social obligations. (Hofstede, 2005)

## 3.5   Communication across cultures

Communication is the heart of all international and organizational relations. It is the basic tool for understanding, cooperation and action. (Moran, Harris, Moran, 2007)

As we all know, one of the most significant differences which distinguish people from animals is communication. Throughout the whole history of humankind the level of communication between people with no doubt increased a lot, at least in comparison with any other species. This fact could be on one hand considered as indisputable advantage, and in fact in most cases it is, but on the other hand, any collision in communication can have very bad consequences.

This issue is tightly connected with culture. When interacting with other people, especially from other cultures, we should have on mind that there are so many variables unknown to the communicator as for example national customs, attitudes, beliefs, values and many other aspects of one's life. It simply means that we cannot base our assumptions and predictions of someone's behaviour on our customs and rules. (Moran, Harris, Moran, 2007) It usually leads to misunderstanding which is certainly unfavourable.

Therefore it is crucial to respect several rules in communication. Mead (2005) emphasizes that during communication (receiving or sending a message) the most important think is to understand the context. It plays its role especially when the process of communication is between two or more people/groups from different culture. The purpose and meaning of the message is clear only when we understand the context and vice versa. Nevertheless context is not the only think which should be understood. At first we should know to whom we are transmitting the message. Than also the time, place, medium and style of communication must be chosen appropriately. And of course the content should be clear and well prepared; it means to understand the context as well as the purpose of the message. (Mead, 2005)

Another aspect of communication is obviously a language. It is said that language expresses cultural identity, in other words our speech represents facts, our ideas but also our attitudes, beliefs and viewpoints. (Kramsch, 1998) And that is the reason why we have to be very sensitive when speaking with someone from different culture. After all the language has its own cultural value and we should always be aware of this fact.

What does it actually mean for the manager? That during the process of interaction with the other party, the "second language" must be chosen in advance. It is also defined as a "bridge language" and in most cases in the whole world it is English. (Thomas, 2008) It means that both sides must know at least one common language or use other means in order to understand each other (translator etc.). It usually results in very demanding conversation thus both sides must concentrate a lot and pay special attention to the whole process of cross-cultural communication. Another basic principle is to set some commonly used terminology which would be understood and clear to everybody in the particular business environment. Although most of the difficulties (concerning the language) arise among people speaking different languages, some slight differences can exist also in terms of one-language speakers (slang, jargon, idioms etc.). Nevertheless these are usually explained very easily.

From the other point of view, we must also realize that the whole communicating process is, aside from language, also a matter of communication style, practices and conventions. (Thomas, 2008) And this makes the whole process sort of unique.

Besides an ordinary, verbal communication, we know also a non-verbal one. It is another way how to deal with people. Or it is better to say, it helps us during the communication process, especially during the cross-cultural one. It more or less provides our conversation with additional information like our feelings and emotions. In some situations people have no other chance than relying on such a kind of communication. It is usually defined as a body language which covers our gestures, stance, eye movement, voice quality and many other factors influencing us when interacting with our environment. It is even said that around 75 percent of all communication is non-verbal. (Mead, 2005)

The following practical guidelines presented by Moran, Harris and Moran (2007) should helps us to understand the characteristics and practices of the international (multicultural) communication.

- ***We cannot avoid communication*** – The whole body (body language) and actually all our behaviour contains a message. We simply cannot get rid of it.

- ***Communication still does not mean understanding*** – Even when we agree that we are communicating with someone, it does not mean that we understand each other until the interpretation of symbols (words/gestures) being used is the same.

- ***Communication is non-reversible*** – We cannot take our "words" back, nevertheless we can explain or restate them.

- ***The understanding of context is necessary*** – (already explained above in the text)

- ***Communication is dynamic process*** – We cannot passively participate. We either send or receive a message or even both at once.

## 3.6 Negotiation

Negotiation is with no doubt one of the main activities of each manager. Either negotiation within a firm or above its borders is significant part of its everyday job. Especially dealing with conciliators of other firms who can possibly come from different culture requires certain knowledge about their national culture as well as the organizational one. Therefore the manager must perfectly understand all the aspects of cross-cultural communication.

In the process of negotiation Mead (2005) emphasizes following aspect as the most important. Especially in the rapidly changing environment which cannot avoid an influence from different cultures. These main points are:

*Where* **to negotiate?** – Either at your place (gives you the advantage of home territory), their place (helps you to discover their organizational structure, culture etc.) or at some neutral place (compromise between both sides).

*When* **to negotiate?** – The timing is crucial if we consider all possible threats connected with differences in cultural habits (national holidays, working hours etc.).

*Who* **negotiates?** – At first the number of negotiators must be chosen, then the rank of each negotiator (given by the company) should be equivalent and finally there have to be certain level of confidence between all participants.

*Why* **negotiate?** – The companies have to be first of all sure in what they want to achieve and what they are willing to concede. Moreover they have to be aware also about the other side's interests.

*Who* **has authority to decide?** – This aspect certainly varies across the cultures. It depends on the national culture (the task of authority) but mainly it is affected by the organizational culture. It can be either a leader of the negotiating team or even a person not present at the meeting at all.

*How* **to negotiate?** – The general knowledge of negotiation goes beyond this work, nevertheless in terms of cross-cultural negotiation it is important to be aware of the other side's needs as well as customs, values, beliefs and other aspects of the their culture.

## 3.7  Organizational culture

At first let us to define the term organizational culture as such. It stands for the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.[8] Although this definition can remind us the definition of national culture, it definitely does not mean the same. But about the divergence of those two terms I will speak later in this chapter.

Organizational culture as a term which is describing how people behave in a particular corporation was first used in 1960's as a synonym for organizational climate. From a viewpoint of many anthropologists and other people dealing with this issue, the organizational culture is:

- **Holistic**: linked to culture as a whole which is more than all its parts together
- **Determined by history**: expressing the history of the organization
- **Associated with matters studied by anthropologists**: common issues with national cultures studies
- **Constructed socially**: formed and kept by group of people creating one organization
- **Difficult to change**: characteristic attitudes and traditions of an organization are relatively difficult to change

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[8] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/CULTURE, 30.11.09

### 3.7.1 Organizational vs. National culture

Organizational culture differs mainly on the level of practices while national culture mainly on values. It comes to this, that the organizational culture is more or less manageable. On the other hand the national culture must be accepted as it is taking into account that it is based on values. Even if we know about this fact, also organizations might have some effect on their employees and other people involved such as fundamental attitudes, values or some of their beliefs. (Thomas, 2008) That is, when managing international business we have to be aware of both, organizational and national culture differences. On the Table 1 we can see the biggest divergence in both cultures considering four aspects; meanings, relationships, its origin and involvement.

| National culture | Organizational culture |
|---|---|
| Shared meanings | Shared behaviours |
| Unconditional relationship | Conditional relationship |
| Born into in | Socialized into it |
| Totally immersed | Partly involved |

**Table 1 -** Comparison of national and organizational culture (Thomas, 2008)

# 4   The empirical part - Case study

The empirical part of my Bachelor thesis is about the real experiences of people who have ever worked in another culture than their native one. Particularly Czechs but also foreigners contributed on the research by means of in-depth questionnaire. Their working positions as well as the length of the stay are various which makes the inquiry even more efficient. At the end of this chapter I will compare the results with the theoretical background and furthermore I will try to present some practical proposals and recommendations.

## 4.1   Aims of the empirical research

The primary aim of my research is to discover and understand the main aspects of the issue of working in a multicultural environment. In other words to comprehend all elements connected with this matter. I will try to do so by means of a "electronic" interview or better to say a set of in-depth questions sent to 36 people with a working experience abroad. Through these questions I will get to know for instance what were the main incentives for people to apply for a job abroad - in another culture or what were the main difficulties connected with their stay in a new cultural environment etc. But I will speak in detail about all the questions and further analyse them later in this chapter.

## 4.2   Data collected

As mentioned above, all the data needed for the empirical part of my thesis will be delivered from the questionnaires. The questions are open ended and were primary designed to provide me with as deep answers as possible. I finally used mixed methods because I needed to get extended answers to be able to understand the real matter of the phenomenon of working in a multicultural environment. The reason for the use of

mixed method rather than pure qualitative or quantitative approach is that I was finally not able to get enough respondents for real in-depth interviews. So I combined those two methods in order to get sufficient results for my research.

## 4.3   Evaluation of results

At first each question will be listed separately and consequently analyzed. The first two questions are rather about the respondents than about the issue as such but the following eight questions are certainly more interesting and thus more relevant for the purposes of this research. In addition in some of the questions a summary of the most frequent answers will be provided.

### 4.3.1 Questions 1 – 5

Question 1

❶ *Enter your name and your nationality.*

The total number of all respondents is 36 which is hopefully enough for the purposes of this inquiry. From those 36 people 21 are women and 15 men. As I said, many of them are Czechs, concretely 27 and the rest 9 of them are foreigners from 5 countries – Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Slovakia and Sweden.

Question 2

❷ *In which foreign country/countries have you worked and for how long? (What was your position and what kind of industry have you worked in?)*

To list and quantitatively analyze all the answers to this question would be most probably ineffective according to the fact that the total number of "target countries" is about 40. I will therefore list just those which are repeating several times. This will give us also a picture which countries are favoured at most in terms of working abroad.

Definitely the most visited country was Great Britain, than New Zealand, USA, Australia, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Germany, Canada but also Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh, India, Mexico, Egypt and many others. The average length of employment of respondents in foreign country was around 1 year. The range was between 3 months until couple of years.

If we have a look at the first four countries, we can see that all of them are English speaking countries which also mean that the culture is not so diverse. It simply shows that the language as well as the culture plays their role in the process of choosing our potential place where to work. Furthermore the next most favourite places are mainly European countries where the culture is not so diverse as well. So at the first sight we can see that people primary choose countries according to the language and similar culture. Of course we are speaking about working experiences. It would be most probably converse in the case of tourist experience. The difference is that they do not require deeper knowledge about the new culture thus they are not afraid to travel to more exotic destinations with completely different cultures.

The range of working positions of all respondents was very wide as well. Because of many people experience their first employment abroad in their years of study, they usually do not have a big choice of jobs. The most frequent jobs occupied by the students were in this case farming, babysitting, or other manual jobs. Nevertheless most of the rest of respondents were working in higher positions, which they either found on their own, or which were opened by their mother companies. Lot of them worked there in a middle management (insurance companies, financial market etc.) and some of them even in the top management. But as I suppose in this kind of research the position is not so important in terms that the clash of cultures occurs more or less everywhere in a working environment.

❸ *What were the determining incentives to apply for a job abroad? (career step, experience, standard of life…)*

Once more the variety of answers in this question was quite wide. But this is what I primary desired to explore all the real answers in order to get the best results. However, the most common answer was for sure to collect new experiences. Mainly connected with exploring new culture, lifestyle, people or simply be independent. The second most common incentive for people to apply for a job in another cultural environment was language, either to improve their actual knowledge or even studying a new one. But as I said, when people travel in terms of employment, they usually choose a country with language they already know.

Apart from the two main incentives - experience and language, many other were mentioned. For instance a career step, sport activity, travelling, leaving everyday stereotype at home and some others. But what I did not expect was that nearly nobody decided to travel abroad to earn money. And if yes, than it was not his/her main purpose. It was a bit surprising information for me if I consider that in many countries visited by the respondents the economic situation is better than in Czech Republic. On the other hand it perfectly shows that for most of the short-term employment abroad experiences and language are rather more important than money.

*The most common answers - summary*
- Experience
   - learn about new culture and way of life
   - working experience
- Language
- Travelling
- Career step

Question 4

❹ *What did you suggest to be the biggest difficulties during your stay? (What were you afraid of?)*

According to the answers to this question I assume that the expected difficulties are closely connected with the main incentives for going to work abroad. As mentioned in question 3, the two main deciding factors – language and working experience are actually also concerned as the two biggest potential problems. But it makes sense if someone goes to foreign country in order to learn new language and thus he/she is a bit afraid how he/she will manage it. So the language was once more the most frequent answer in this question. The second worry was concerning the working experience as such. People were afraid whether they could find a job at all which is in fact one of the fundamental constrains to be able to stay in the country for certain time. For those who had some job arranged in advance, the situation was different, they in most cases worried whether they would manage it or not or whether it would be enough interesting for them.

Than an interesting fact derived from the answers is that many of the respondents were considerably more afraid before the first experience than before the following one, even when the next country/ies was pretty different in terms of culture as well as in other aspects. This shows us that the first step is really crucial and at the same time that there always exists a way how to "survive" in the multicultural environment. One of the most important things is to try to adopt the new culture as soon as possible. As many respondents state it took them some time to acclimatize but this is certainly something what we should count on when entering new culture.

Some of the respondents who had their job arranged by their companies were usually a bit afraid of the organizational culture. Especially when the country was highly distanced and the manners were expected to be different in every way.

Then of course many other issues were mentioned in the answers, for instance earthquakes, homesickness, kidnapping, terrorists etc. But these things are rather

connected with each particular country than with its culture so I will not analyze them in this research at all.

*The most common answers – summary*

- Language barrier
- Working experience
  - not finding any job at all
  - not satisfying enough
- Different environment
- Nothing (especially after any previous exp.)

Question 5

❺ *What were the main culture differences visible "at first sight"? (First impressions concerning the culture issue)*

The first distinction which was perceived by many of the respondents is of course the language. This is what differentiates the two people at the first place when their cultures meet. On the other hand this is something what everybody expects so it is no surprise for anybody and thus it does not cause any kind of shock.

But what was mentioned by almost all of the answerers was the behaviour of people around. This is something what is visible at the first site as well. How people behave to each other and in a matter of fact to you. What are their everyday practices, how do they behave in particular situations or when facing some problems. The other point of view is how people behave in the working place; whether they are individualistic or rather working in teams, trying to help you in the new environment, building relationships etc. And this is what actually Hofstede was trying to discover in his study. It would be possible to compare my results with his theory of five dimensions but it would exceed beyond this research.

However, as I said the differences in behaviour were perceived practically by everybody. And whether the initial feelings were positive, negative or just unexpected depends for sure on each country and its culture. As mentioned in the question 2, many

of the respondents were working in Great Britain and most of them agree on the opinion that the British and especially the employers perceived them as "immigrants". This is perhaps caused by the fact that many people are going to work there from all over the Europe every year. However, the employer's opinion usually changed when they took up with each other and since the time the relations were in most cases without a problem. By contrast the answerers with a working experience from New Zealand and Australia state that from day one everybody seems to be their friend. People were nice, trustful and willing to help and solve other's difficulties which is for example in our country something really unusual.

Although the behaviour and language are assumed as the biggest differences at the first sight, there exist also other aspects of culture which we perceive nearly immediately when we enter any new country. For example the food, drinks, clothing, music and many other things are creating a specific atmosphere of each country.

At the end I would like to stress that even when many of the respondents underwent a culture shock (slight or stronger one), they were somehow expecting it. But some of them were surprised that also a reverse culture shock can occur. Therefore it in some of the cases caused bigger difficulties than the culture shock itself. So everybody who is staying in another cultural environment for longer time has to be aware of both effects of this phenomenon.

*The most common answers – summary*
- Language
- Behaviour of local people
    - at work
    - in everyday situations
- Food, clothing, music etc.

**4.3.2 Questions 6 – 10**

<u>Question 6</u>

❻ *In which aspects did the "new" culture play the biggest role? (At work, during your leisure time, in communication with others…)*

According to the answers to this question I suppose that the deciding factor whether people perceive the culture more at work or during leisure time depends on the working hours. In other words if someone spends the most of the day at work, the culture definitely plays its role there and vice versa. But the truth is that during the leisure time there exist much more possibilities how to learn something about the culture; mainly through the communication with others, simply in everyday life and not in the office where the practices are more or less similar.

Another aspect was a language. In cases when someone does not know the new language on certain level it is obviously a problem to communicate with anybody around.

Finally it has to be said that working in a multicultural environment is always easier when there is not just one "newcomer" and the team itself is a multicultural. It helps to understand each other faster and the relationships are consequently stronger as well. Moreover it creates a good atmosphere which leads to better working performance. So when someone was travelling with a friend or colleague, he/she felt more self-confident and relaxed, at least at the beginning of the stay.

<u>Question 7</u>

❼ *What were actually the main difficulties and problems during your stay abroad? (please try to cover especially these, connected with the culture issue)*

For the group of answerers who had not found the job before the trip, the biggest initial trouble was actually to find any job at all. In some cases it was more difficult in some cases less but finally no one had to come back home by reasons of unemployment. Then some problems occurred in connection with the work itself. Usually at the beginning the work was either not satisfying or even too much physically or time

demanding. Nevertheless everybody more or less got used to it and after all it was considered as a good experience. Moreover such a difficult employment helped the workers to understand how hard it is and what a physically demanding job is all about. For some of them it was even the only chance how to earn money for further travelling around the country.

Those who had the job arranged by their company in advance and travelled with families usually faced other problems. Their position at work was clearly defined and their colleagues count on the fact that they would work with someone from diverse culture. Thus the main difficulties did not usually occur during the work but in other aspect of their stay abroad. Big issue was for instance schools and all other things concerning the children perhaps because they are not so flexible and it is harder for them to socialize but finally it was definitely a good contribution for their future life.

As mentioned in the answers on Question 5 the problems occurred also during the interaction with the local people. Mostly in the cases when the country is experiencing constant arrival of foreigners with a view of working there. Then the first reactions on the part of the locals were unpleasant and sometimes even problematic.

Other difficulties were connected obviously with the practical issues as buying certain products, different electric sockets, eating at restaurants and many others. Then also the change of lifestyle was considered as a difficulty at first. However, it is something what was generally desired so the adaptation did not take a long time and it was rather interesting and enjoyable to get used to it.

*The most common answers – summary*
- Finding a job
- The job itself (difficult/unsatisfying)
- Interaction with others
- Practical issues
- Different life style

Question 8

❽ *What are your characteristics (abilities) which helped you the most to "survive" in this new environment? Which of them were essential? (Language, being aware of different culture…)*

As expected, the most common answer was once more language. It is really a useful tool when entering new country in order to manage all the necessary initial matters. On the other hand even with basic knowledge of the language it is possible to "survive" in new culture. It just requires other abilities and skills as courage and motivation.

Then the ability to learn new things is needed as well as being flexible and able to adapt to the new cultural environment. Also being open-minded and positive is something what counts especially at the beginning when we do not know a lot about the new culture.

Communicativeness, diligence and humbleness are characteristics which helped mainly throughout the working process but might be helpful also during the socialization. Particularly modesty is very important if we assume that not everybody is going to work abroad with a huge budget in his/her pocket. Than of course the ability to socialize is really "vital" in terms of learning new things about the culture and thus become a part of it.

*The most common answers – summary*
- Language abilities
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Modesty
- Communicativeness (open-mindedness)
- Ability to learn new things

Question 9
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> ❾ ***What advice would you give to other potential employees applying for a job abroad / in another culture?***

If all the answers are simply summarized in one sentence, it would be – Definitely go and do it. It means that the absolute majority would recommend this experience to anyone else.

However, the most common advice was concerning the language abilities and basically all other characteristics mentioned in the Question 8 as flexibility (adaptability), positive thinking, modesty or communicativeness. Furthermore to get in contact with potential employers or any other local people in advance was stressed by many respondents as well. It helps to orientate oneself sooner and moreover it creates a certain mental support.

Then it is very important to learn at least the basics about the new culture and try new things like their sports, food and drinks. Subsequently it helps us to learn the "social code" when it comes how to greet people, how to accommodate to their behaviour in particular situations etc. In other words, expect the culture shock which will most probably occur.

And finally perhaps the most difficult advice is not to be afraid of such a kind of experience. There is always a possibility to go back home.

*The most common answers – summary*

- To definitely undertake such experience
- Learn about new culture beforehand
- Have at least basic language skills
- Be flexible, humble and communicative
- Get some contacts in advance

<u>Question 10</u>

**⑩ *Please try to make an overall evaluation of your working experience.***

The overall experience was by all of the answerers considered as a great one. The opportunity to work abroad and in different culture was a big contribution in every aspect. Mainly the finding that things can be managed differently which for sure broadened the general view on problems solving. Moreover the multicultural environment itself, i.e. meeting with different people from various cultures and learning their patterns of behaviour played a great role for further development. And this holds not just for the working experience but also for one's personality. It helps to see the country with different eyes of course but also your own country and people (being more critical).

The knowledge of language was doubtlessly improved in most of the cases as well as the independence, modesty and other features mentioned in the two previous questions. And finally one interesting and surely true answer was that it is possible to find a job everywhere it just depends which one. And if we are able to get a job abroad in another environment it is then much easier to find it in our home country.

## 4.4  Summary of findings

The empirical part of my Bachelor thesis provided me with very interesting and in many cases unexpected information about the main topic. Since the respondents were real experienced people, it makes this research relevant and gives us authentic results.

According to all answers received, I can say that this type of experience – a working experience in multicultural environment changes more or less one's personality in many ways. Through this experience we can learn a lot about the new country and its culture and furthermore about our own country and people. We simply learn how to perceive ourselves and our nation from other point of view which is extremely important for our further development (working and personal features).

Such an experience moreover helps us to realize that some sort of problems could be solved in many different ways. It further leads to significant improvement of our operational skills when we come back to our home company and the finding that things can be managed differently is more than crucial for our future. It doubtlessly broadens our point of view on many things and processes around.

It has to be also stressed that the language is very important in terms of cross-cultural communication. Without at least basics of language knowledge many of the respondents would have big problems to find a job or manage other things connected with moving to foreign country.

Although several problems and difficulties occurred during the working experience, the overall evaluation was positive and no one would put it back.

# 5 Conclusion

This research was conducted in order to be able to understand all the aspects concerning the working process in multicultural environment. This has been done by exploring and further analysing the theory connected to it. It means mainly the work of Geert Hofstede who is most probably the best known scientist in this field. But many other authors and their theories were stressed in the theoretical part of this thesis as well.

As to the conclusion of the theoretical part, the most important finding is that the culture really plays a significant role in international business and process of communication. There have to be followed several rules in order to be successful manager operating in the environment where cultures meet. Moreover today's business is rather about global matters so each person without exception who is somehow involved in the process of international encounter must be aware of the cultural issue. Especially when we realize that perhaps due to globalization and integration of societies the issue is becoming more and more current. And finally if we consider that each one of us is actually pretty much influenced by its national culture (and further organizational culture as well), it makes the topic even more important and interesting. In other words the awareness of a divergence in cultures and its importance in the working process is an indisputable advantage (if not a necessity) for everybody who is operating in the international environment.

The empirical part of my thesis is dealing with this issue from the practical point of view. By means of an in-depth questionnaire distributed among people with working experience in a multicultural environment I derived many interesting answers which helped me further on to fulfil the aims of my research. The results corroborate the fact that communication is very important in terms of cross-cultural encounter. The language is considered the most important tool helping us to "survive" in new cultural environment. But also other personal features are crucial in order to be successful during our employment abroad. These are first of all the ability to assimilate to the new environment, modesty, communicativeness, open-mindedness, flexibility etc.

In addition all the readers were evaluating their experience as a positive one and would recommend it to all potential employees as well. It had broadened their viewpoints on many things and thus it indisputably contributed to their future development. They learned to look at themselves from outside which means that they improved their intra-personal skills and it is one of the most valuable skills for any further personal progress.

Finally it has to be said again that culture plays really prominent role in terms of international encounter, communication or negotiation and must be always taken into account.

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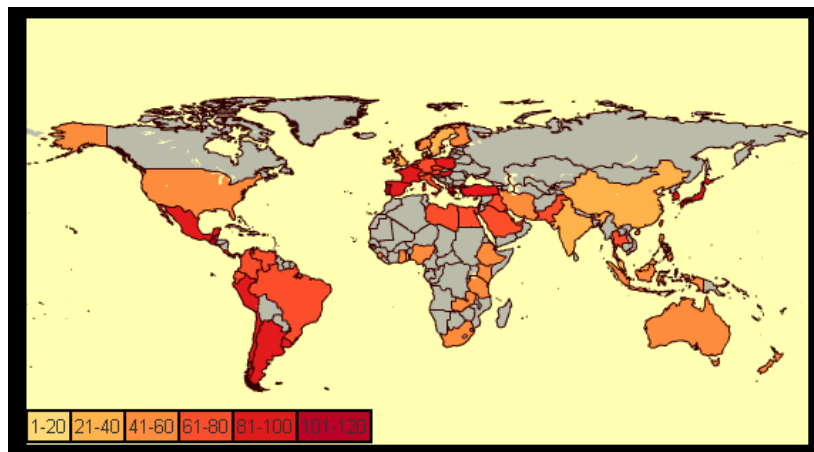London, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2008, ISBN: 978-1-4129-
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# 7 Supplements

Pictures showing each of the five cultural dimensions in more detail
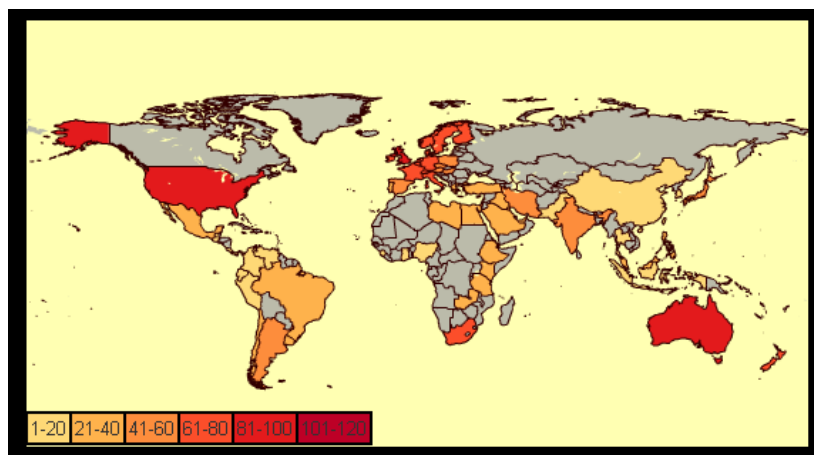(How each dimension is represented in particular countries)
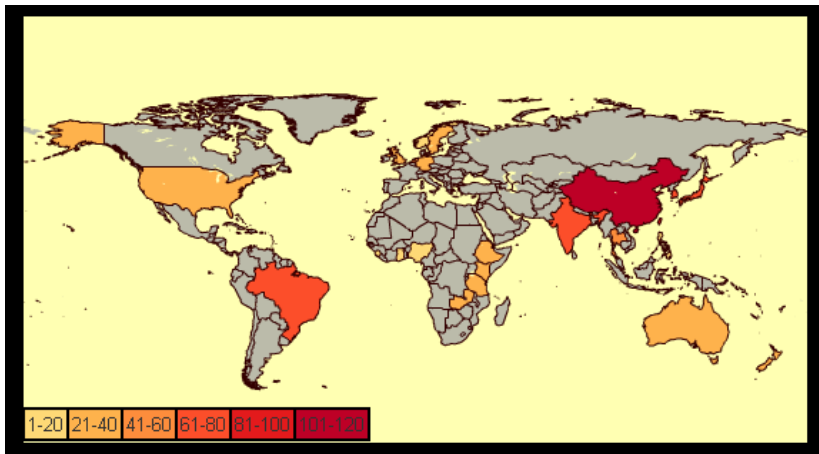- http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions, 7.3.2010
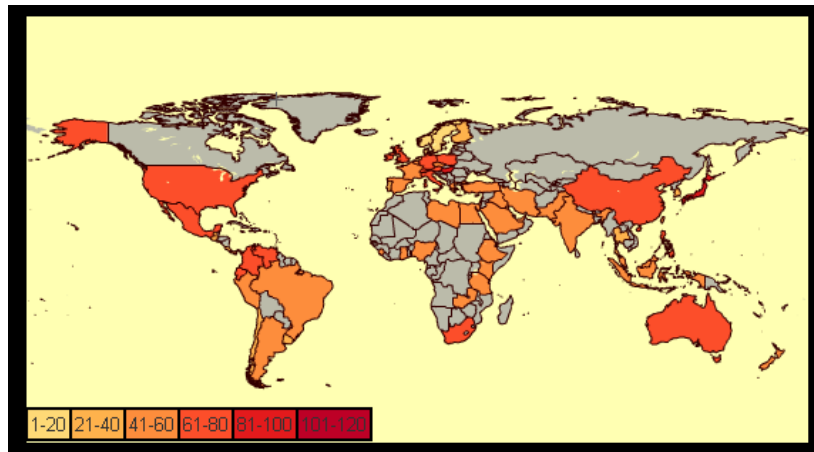


Masculinity



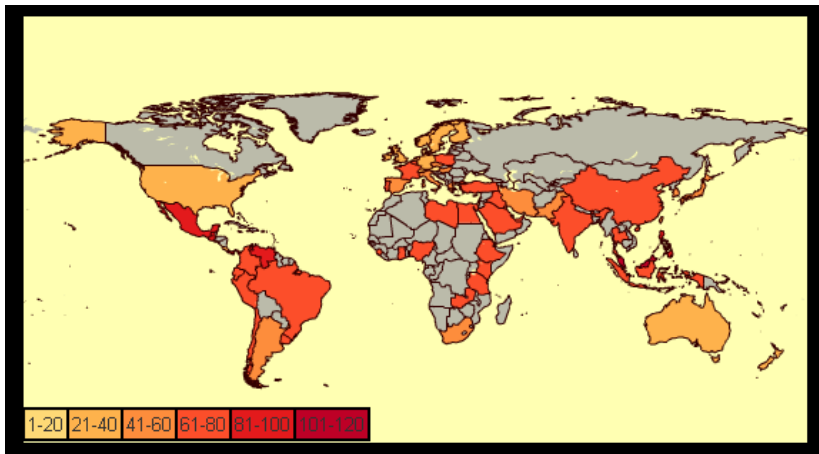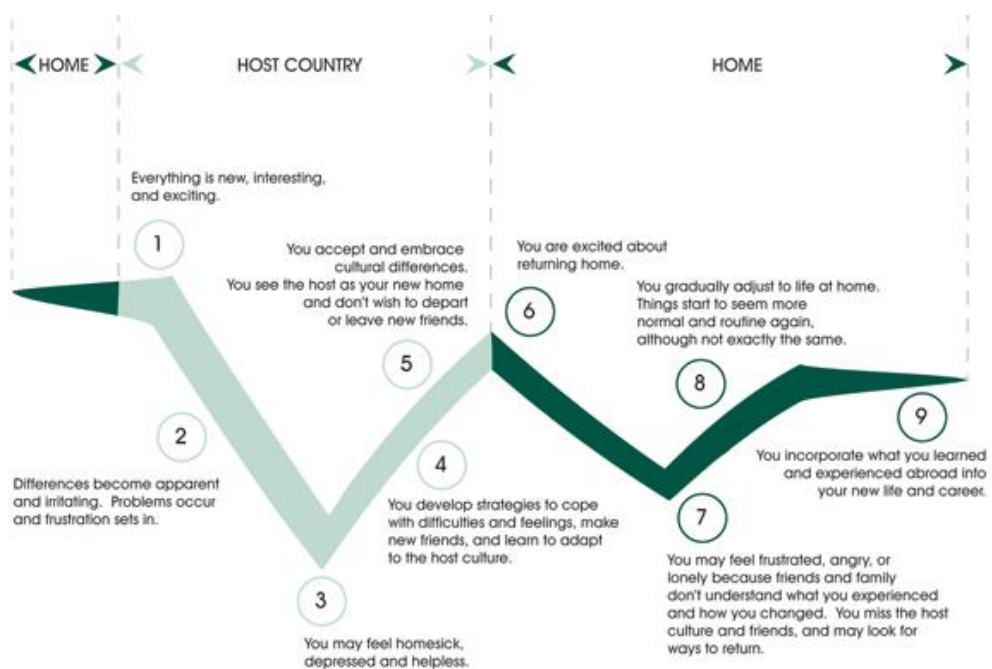Uncertainty avoidance



Individualism

Long-Term Orientation



Power distance

This graph illustrates the culture shock in more detail, step by step
- http://www.nhtvwiki.nl/wiki02/images/3/39/Culture_shock.jpg, 12.2.2010



HOME    HOST COUNTRY    HOME

Everything is new, interesting, and exciting.

1

You accept and embrace cultural differences. You see the host as your new home and don't wish to depart or leave new friends.

You are excited about returning home.

6

You gradually adjust to life at home. Things start to seem more normal and routine again, although not exactly the same.

5

8

2

9

Differences become apparent and irritating. Problems occur and frustration sets in.

4

You incorporate what you learned and experienced abroad into your new life and career.

You develop strategies to cope with difficulties and feelings, make new friends, and learn to adapt to the host culture.

7

3

You may feel frustrated, angry, or lonely because friends and family don't understand what you experienced and how you changed. You miss the host culture and friends, and may look for ways to return.

You may feel homesick, depressed and helpless.

The actual questionnaire sent to the respondents:

Hello,

My name is Tomáš Petr and I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student of the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague. I address you because I would like to ask you for help with my Bachelor thesis through this "electronic interview". Its topic is working in a multicultural environment and I hope your experiences, which I unfortunately do not have, will contribute to the theoretical part of my work.

The interview is not longer than 15 minutes and it will be used only for the study purposes.

Thank you very much; I really appreciate your help.

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Please try to be as deep as possible when answering following questions, nevertheless if you do not want to respond some question at all due to any reason, I will understand it.

1. Enter your name and your nationality.

2. In which foreign country/countries have you worked and for how long? (What was your position and what kind of industry have you worked in?)

3. What were the determining incentives to apply for a job abroad? (career step, experience, standard of life…)

4. What did you suggest to be the biggest difficulties during your stay? (What were you afraid of?)

5. What were the main culture differences visible ¨at first sight¨? (First impressions concerning the culture issue)

6. In which aspects did the ¨new¨ culture play the biggest role? (At work, during your leisure time, in communication with others…)

7. What were actually the main difficulties and problems during your stay abroad? (please try to cover especially these, connected with the culture issue)

8. What are your characteristics (abilities) which helped you the most to ¨survive¨ in this new environment? Which of them were essential? (Language, being aware of different culture…)

9. What advice would you give to other potential employees applying for a job abroad / in another culture?

10. Please try to make an overall evaluation of your working experience.

In case, you think you have any additional notes or information which could help me with the research, please do not hesitate to write them down, I appreciate everything valuable. (e.g. contact on someone else with such a kind of working experience…)

If you require any further information or anything is not clear, feel free to contact me (techna2@volny.cz), it is my pleasure to explain it in another way.

Thank you once more for contributing on my Bachelor thesis.

I look forward to your reply,

Best regards,

Tomáš Petr
(techna2@volny.cz)