

**HOCHSCHULE RHEIN-WAAL  
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**HOW COULD A GLOBAL COMPANY  
COMMUNICATE AND WORK INTERCULTURALLY?  
DETECTING CULTURAL PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION  
TO SUCCESSFULLY WORK IN A GLOBAL COMPANY**

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## **Declaration of Authenticity**

The author hereby declares that, except where acknowledged and referenced, this Bachelor Thesis is entirely her own work and has not been submitted for any degree or other qualification at Rhein-Waal University or any other third level institution in Germany or abroad.

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## **Abstract**

This research considers the hidden aspects of culture suggested by Edward T. Hall and Joseph Shaules, when referring to intercultural communication. It uses the cultural dimensions from Erin Meyer, Geert Hofstede, and Richard Lewis to explain cultural misunderstandings between the German and Indian teams of a multinational. It also considers the Expectancy Violations Theory from Judee K. Burgoon to improve communication among dissimilar cultures.

You think the only people who are people  
Are the people who look and think like you  
But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger  
You'll learn things you never knew, you never knew

Colors of the Wind (Kuhn, 1995)

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## **1. Introduction**

Saint-Exupéry (2010, chap. 21) already knew that “what is essential is invisible to the eyes.” Culture, as research suggests, also has its invisible part to the eyes. Shaules (2007, p. 40) defines those unseen parts as ‘deep culture.’ Culture not only consists of discernible things like outfits, meals, and constructed buildings, but also of values, beliefs, and behaviors (Shaules, 2007, p. 40). Though the tangible aspects of culture are easier to be understood and explained by people, the subjective cultural aspects of a social group are usually outside of their awareness (Shaules, 2007, pp. 41-42). Hofstede (2010, pp. 5, 11) states that culture relates of a set of learnings passed from one generation to the other, and that human behavior, therefore, is socially learned. It does not come only from personality traits or genetics, but it also changes from one social group to the other (Hofstede, 2010, p. 6). Since there’s a great diversity of social behavior across the globe, “there is a structure in this variety that can serve as a basis for mutual understanding” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 4). Different scholars defined different cultural dimensions to facilitate intercultural interactions, as well as in an attempt to conceive cultural differences (Lewis, 2007, pp. 28-29).

The purpose of this thesis is to propose a solution for intercultural miscommunications caused when the communicators disregard their subjective culture. That is, when groups of diverse nations interrelate while being unaware that they value, believe, and behave differently. This thesis also uses the real case of a multinational whose teams faced productivity challenges due to intercultural misunderstandings. Interviews were conducted with 23 members of the German and Indian teams. Cultural theories were applied to the results of the interviews, and explanations for misunderstandings inside the company were given based on cultural explanations. Regarding the cultural classifications used, this research considers a macro approach to culture: the cultural taxonomy of nations suggested by Erin Meyer (2014, pp. 15-16), Geert Hofstede (2010, p. 31), and Richard Lewis (2007, p. 42). Though other authors also classified national cultures differently (Lewis, 2007, p. 28), this paper focuses on the respective three scholars because their taxonomies were identified in the employees’ utterances.

The structure of this dissertation consists of five parts. The first session is this current introduction to the thesis, where the general idea of the paper is presented. The second session, Literature Review, focuses on introducing the reader to the overall meaning of

culture. It is subdivided into four parts: The Meaning of Culture, The Relation Between Culture and Cognitive Patterns, Cultural Dimensions, and Intercultural Miscommunication. Section 2.1, The Meaning of Culture, introduces the reader to the concept of culture considering the ideas of ‘deep culture’ (Shaules, 2007, p. 40) and unconscious culture (Hall, 1976, p. 152). Section 2.2, The Relation Between Culture and Cognitive Patterns, considers the studies of Richard E. Nisbett (2003, p. xvii) which claims that thought processes of humankind are shaped by cultures. Section 2.3, Cultural Dimensions, briefly uncovers the cultural taxonomies of Erin Meyer (2014), Geert Hofstede (2010), and Richard Lewis (1996). Section 2.4, Intercultural Miscommunication, discloses the six Intercultural Communication Stumbling Blocks according to Professor LaRay M. Barna (1994). It explains what communication is and explores the meaning of intercultural communication.

The third session, Methodology, presents the case of a multinational dealing with communication challenges in international teams. It also introduces the reader to how the interviews were conducted, to some details of the considered company, and to how the interview analyses were conveyed (Philipp Mayring’s Qualitative Content Analysis was used). Due to confidentially matters, the company will not be named. The fourth session, Interviews’ Results and Application of Cultural Taxonomies, connects the interviews’ results to the cultural theories. It uses three categories from Erin Meyer (2014) and three others from Geert Hofstede (2010) to explain the misinterpretation the two teams had of each other’s behaviors, detailed explaining all six cultural taxonomies considered. It also brings the Richard Lewis Model (1996) to highlight the overall dissimilarities between German and Indian cultures. The last part of the fourth session points to the different levels of fear of failure among Germans and Indians, as the interviews’ results and the studies of Heinze *et. al* (2022, p. 9) confirm. The fifth session, Recommendations and Improvement Areas, proposes solutions for the teams of this global company considering individuals unaware of cultural dimensions.

In sum, this monograph was mainly based on the interviews with employees of two teams from a global company and on the studies of Edward T. Hall (1959; 1976), Joseph Shaules (2007), Richard E. Nisbett (2003), Erin Meyer (2014), Geert Hofstede (2010), Richard Lewis (1996), LaRay M. Barna (1994), and Judee K. Burgoon (1995; 2015).



## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Meaning of Culture**

Hofstede (2010, p. 6) defined culture as the “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group (...) from others” and the “unwritten rules of the social game.” Hall (1959, p. 47) mentions that “culture is learned and shared behavior.” For Kim (2014, p. 517), a population’s culture is a “collectively shared knowledge system” of inner worldviews. Culture, therefore, is “a system of sense-making,” and it goes beyond what is visible to the eyes (Hall, 2017, p. 120).

Joseph Schaules (2007, p. 238) explained culture as the “shared projects and meanings” within a community. ‘Products’ relate to the objects, to what is visible and tangible: food, music, churches, architecture, language, and behavior, for example (Schaules, 2007, p. 239). Simply put, products are tangible, meanings not (Schaules, 2007, p. 239). Since handshakes carry “a shared cultural interpretation”, being “demonstrated and observed by all”, they can be considered products of a culture (Shaules, 2007, p. 239). It is important to bear in mind that products of a culture are not the whole culture itself, but only part of it. The unseen aspect of culture might count as much as the visible, if not even more (Hall, 1976, p. 166), as Figure 1 (Shaules, 2007, p. 40) indicates. ‘Meanings’ are how people of a given community interpret their products (Shaules, 2007, p. 239). In other words, meanings are the framework of concepts that people use to understand the behavior of each other (Shaules, 2007, p. 239).

Like Shaules, Edward T. Hall (1959, p. 61) also mentions the concept of explicit and implicit culture. The explicit culture can be specified and talked about, for it is like a conscious part of culture, like the law system, for example (Hall, 1959, p. 61). The implicit culture, on the other hand, relates to what exists outside people’s awareness, such as one’s feelings about success (Hall, 1959, p. 61). According to Hall (1959, p. 36, 57), culture is learned, consisting of “a complex series of activities (...) with origins deeply buried in the past.” Hofstede (2010, pp. 10-11) also claims that culture reproduces itself, naming ‘homeostasis’ the process of passing to the next generation the education had by the parents.

Human behavior is guided by ‘values’ and ‘norms’ (Shaules, 2007, p. 239). Besides being intangible, values and norms are guided by ‘deep assumptions’ that people have, a

synonym for hidden drivers of social behavior (Shaules, 2007, p. 239). It is possible, therefore, that intercultural miscommunication usually happens at the level of deep assumptions:

[Deep assumptions] include things such as assumptions about hierarchy and equality, degree of gender separation, the importance of independence, and so on. The norm ‘bow when the teacher enters the room’ may be explained by the value ‘respect is important’. These may be based on the deep assumption that hierarchical relationships are normal and should involve deference and caretaking. The norm ‘don’t have sexual relations before getting married’ may be explained by the value that ‘chastity is good’. One deep assumption behind this value may be that sex outside of marriage is impure. A deep assumption behind having infants sleep separately from their mother may be that independence is important. A deep assumption behind having infants sleep with their mother may be that children need nurturing. Deep assumptions are rarely questioned and often form the framework within which problems are resolved. (Shaules, 2007, p. 242)

Figure 1. Cultural Iceberg

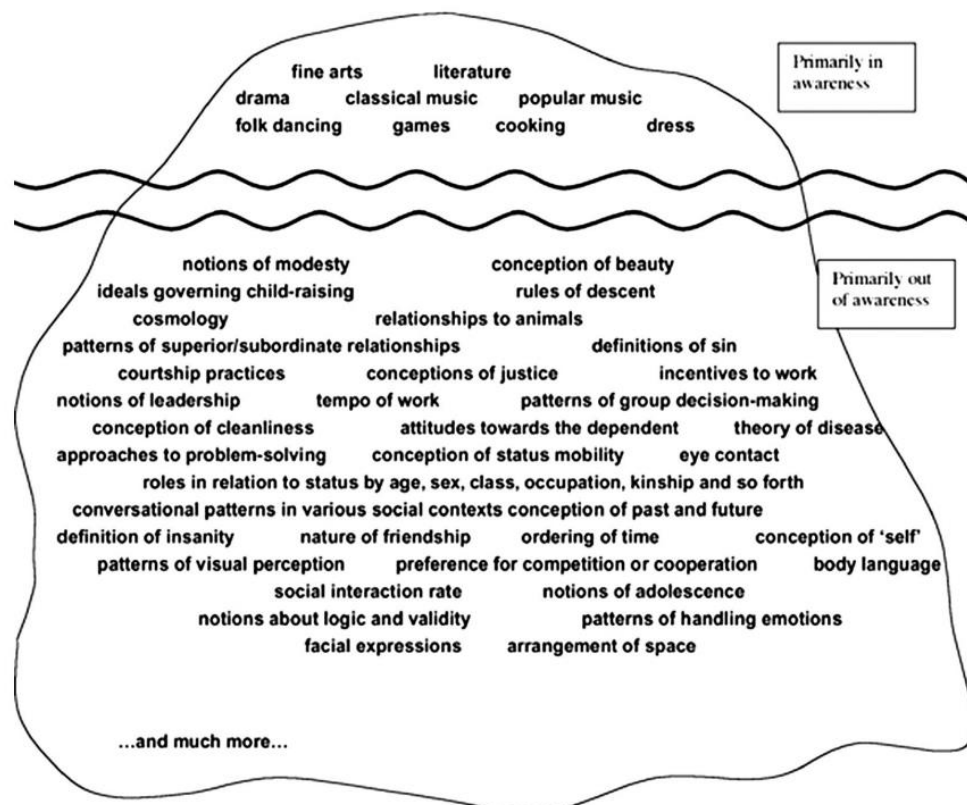


Figure 1. Source: (Shaules, 2007, p. 40)

Considering that people’s values and practices start being learned at a young age, they are also influenced by the environment that surrounds them (Hofstede, 2010, p. 09). As Figure 2 indicates (Hofstede, 2010, p. 10), someone’s 10 first years of life are mostly influenced by the teachings of their family, like parents or older siblings. From 10 to 20

years of age, behavior is learned more from peers at school or work, from schoolteachers or classmates (Hofstede, 2010, p. 11). If human behavior is learned, the social group one grows up in shapes one's behavior and how one conceives the world (Hofstede, 2010, pp. 06, 09). Different groups have different symbols (spoken language, and the national flag, for example), heroes (such as Barbie or Superman in the United States, and Asterix in France), rituals (like greetings, paying respect to people, and going to the toilet), and values (for instance, feelings of what is moral vs. immoral, ugly vs. beautiful, forbidden vs. permitted) (Hofstede, 2010, pp. 08-09). Similar to Shaules' (2007, p. 240) idea of products and meanings and Hall's (1959, p. 61) terminology of explicit or implicit culture, Hofstede's (2010, p. 09) symbols, heroes, and rituals are "visible to an outsider observer." However, "their cultural meaning (...) is invisible and lies precisely and only in the way these practices are interpreted by the insiders" (Hofstede, 2010, p. 09).

Figure 2. The Learning of Values and Practices

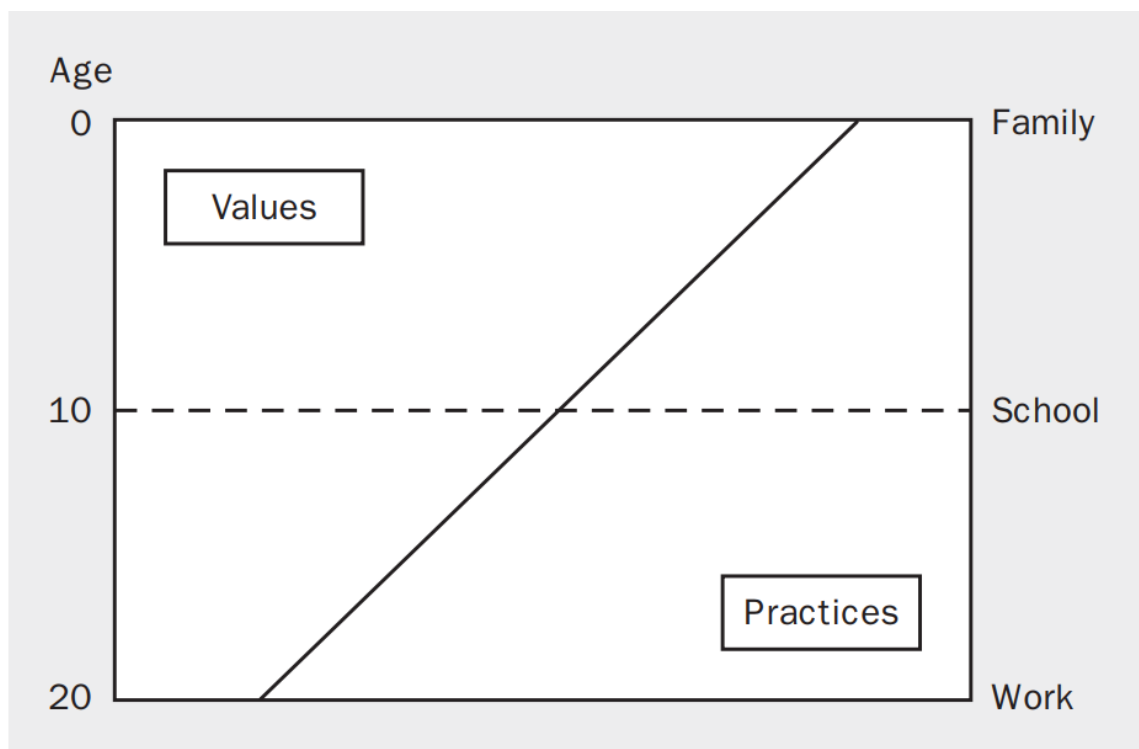


Figure 2. Source: (Hofstede, 2010, p. 10)

Since values are learned at a young age, people are usually unaware of them (Hofstede, 2010, p. 11). Hall (1976, pp. 152, 165-166) calls such unawareness 'unconscious culture,' a synonym for individuals not knowing about the rules of culture governing them. Someone would only gain enlightenment of their culture until they interact with people

from other communities, those who do not have the same cultural sense-making of the world (Schaules, 2007, p. 239).

Hall (1959, pp. 67-70) states that patterns of behaviors are formally, informally, or technically passed on. Formal learnings refer to the adult mentoring the youth with precepts never questioned by other adults: 'It is what it is', but the mentor has no clear explanation for the adequate pattern of behavior (Hall, 1959, p. 67). Formal learnings are reflected in statements like, 'Girls don't play football' or 'Boys don't play with dolls' (Hall, 1959, p. 67). On the other hand, informal learnings relate to imitation models (Hall, 1959, p. 68). They refer to a child imitating his peers - when he does what he sees others doing (Hofstede, 2010, p. 10). Informal learnings are the generational taught behaviors, though no one formally verbalizes their rules (Hall, 1959, p. 69). An example of informal learning is a girl absorbing the dating directives of her social group, such as courtship and sexual behavior (Hall, 1959, p. 68). Lastly, the technical learnings have to do with the formal and technical teachings, usually "preceded by a logical analysis" and "coherent outline form" (Hall, 1959, p. 69). They relate to fully conscious behaviors (Hall, 1959, p. 72). Because the armed services as well as linguistic and scientific studies can be written down and recorded, they are considered technical learnings (Hall, 1959, pp. 69, 72-73, 92).

## **2.2 The Relation Between Culture and Cognitive Patterns**

Research suggests that cognitive patterns are shaped by cultures and vice versa (Shaules & Van der Pol, 2022; Nisbett, 2003, p. xx). Nisbett (2003, p. xx) defends that "social practices promote worldviews; the worldviews dictate the appropriate thought processes; and the thought processes both justify the worldviews and support the social practices." For a Westerner to successfully communicate with an Eastern, for example, it is helpful to understand the differences between how both parts of the world approach meaning, interpretation, education, and logic (Nisbett, 2003, pp. xix, xx).

While Western countries (Europeans, Americans, and British Commonwealth) were mostly influenced by Greek doctrines and Aristotle, East Asians were primarily regulated by Confucian and Taoism principles (Nisbett, 2003, p. 29). These two philosophies differ greatly. While the "Greeks were independent and engaged in verbal contention," the "Chinese social life was interdependent," with people praising harmony instead of

debates (Nisbett, 2003, p. 19). While the Greeks focused on the individuality of the objects, the Chinese focused on the ongoing interaction of substances: Aristotle claimed that the property of gravity is what makes a stone fall (singular property), but the Chinese believed that “the movement of the moon (...) caused the tides” (interconnectedness) (Nisbett, 2003, pp. 21-22).

Those ancient principles are still entrenched in contemporary Western-Eastern societies (Nisbett, 2003, p. 44). One example of Western-Eastern opposing thought patterns relates to how different societies accept conflict and negotiation: “Debate is almost as uncommon in modern Asia as in ancient China” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 73). An intense discussion might be avoided in modern Asia “because of the risk to group harmony” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 73). Also, while Westerners tend to categorize objects and use formal logic in problem-solving, East Asians tend to look at objects in relation to their broader context, and that contrast is perceived on, for example, language (Nisbett, 2003, pp. xvi, 157). The spoken language affects how an individual sees the world and creates meanings out of experiences: “Western languages force a preoccupation with focal objects as opposed to context” (Nisbett, 2003, pp. 154-155, 157). Language influences thought, and “different languages are plausibly associated with different systems of representation” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 162).

While Japanese, Chinese, and Korean, are topic-prominent languages, English is subject-prominent (Nisbett, 2003, p. 162). The structure of East Asian languages has one word having many meanings, which requires the speaker to pay greater attention to the contexts of a sentence (Nisbett, 2003, p. 157). On the other hand, the English language doesn't have to pay much attention to the conversation context, for English linguistic markers indicate “whether it is a category or an individual that is being talked about” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 157). Since Eastern societies consider more the context of interactions, when Chinese speakers drink tea, for example, one would ask “Drink more?”, instead of “More tea?”, like English speakers would say (Nisbett, 2003, p. 158). It is interesting to notice that the two different speeches imply two unlike realities for individuals experiencing the same situation (drinking more tea). As Nisbett (2003, p. 201) wrote, “people hold the beliefs they do because of the way they think and they think the way they do because of the nature of the societies they live in.”

## 2.3 Cultural Dimensions

Different authors, like Edward T. Hall, Alfons Trompenaars, Ferdinand Tönnies, Florence Kluckhohn, and Samuel Huntington, for example, used different classifications for cultures at national levels (Lewis, 1996, p. 28-29). The relevance of cultural taxonomies is that they help one to understand why a group of people behave in a certain way and to decode patterns of social behavior (Lewis, 1996, p. 29). Though other taxonomies were examined for this thesis, it only considers the studies of Erin Meyer (2014), Geert Hofstede (2010), and Richard Lewis (1996). Though the current section briefly mentions the cultural considerations of the respective scholars, section 4, Interviews' Results and Application of Cultural Taxonomies, explains the six cultural taxonomies identified in the interviewees' speech, as well as Richard Lewis Model (1996).

Erin Meyer (2014, p. 17) classified the nation cultures in eight categories:

1. Scheduling (linear time vs. flexible time)
2. Communicating (low-context vs. high-context)
3. Trusting (task-based vs. relationship-based)
4. Evaluating (direct negative feedback vs. indirect negative feedback)
5. Persuading (principles-first vs. applications-first)
6. Leading (egalitarian vs. hierarchical)
7. Deciding (consensual vs. top-down)
8. Disagreeing (confrontational vs. avoids confrontation)

Meyer's (2014) first three categories were considered and used for this thesis. They are further explained in Section 4, Interviews' Results and Application of Cultural Taxonomies.

According to Geert Hofstede (2010), national cultures can be classified in six dimensions: Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Long-Term Orientation, and Indulgence. These first three were also considered and used for this thesis, further explained in Section 4, and connected to the interviews' results.

As Figure 3 shows (Lewis, 1996, p. 42), for Richard Lewis the world could be divided into three parts: Linear-Active, Multi-Active, and Reactive. Their respective

characteristics are disclosed on Table 2 (Lewis, 1996, p. 33-34), also further explained on Section 4.

Figure 3. Cultural Types Model

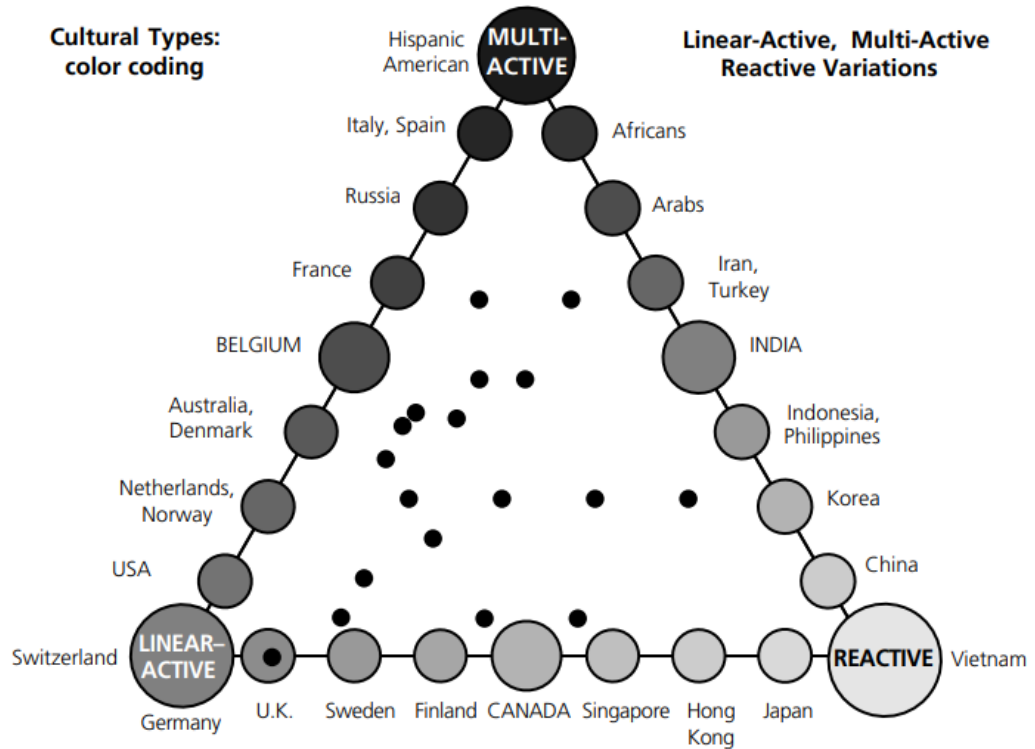


Figure 3. Source: (Lewis, 1996, p. 42)

## 2.4 Intercultural Miscommunications

Since cultural habits are learned and internalized since childhood, an individual only becomes aware of their culture when interacting with people from other cultures (Kim, 2014, p. 517). That is when cultural miscommunication might take place. According to Hall (2017, p. 120), a group grasps meaning through the cultural system of communication at play. However, “what is common sense in one community is not necessarily common sense in another” (Hall, 2017, p. 120). Intercultural communication is when there is “the exchange of information between two groups of (...) different cultures” (Barnett & Jiang, 2017, p. 99). It can be defined as the “process of negotiating meanings across cultures” (Bennett, 2015, p. xxiii). There is a difference, nevertheless, between the terminologies ‘intercultural communication’ and ‘cross-cultural communication’ (Kotthoff, 2007, p. 1). While cross-cultural studies relate to comparing behaviors among cultures, intercultural studies regard the actual interaction among individuals of different cultures (Kotthoff, 2007, p. 1).

For Hall (1959, p. 182), culture is communication, and “man without culture is not man” (1976, p. 220). The impossibility of clearly communicating interculturally exists because each culture has a language of rules, principles, and systems (Hall, 1959, p. 182). One cannot decode the aspects of a foreign culture without the support from members of that same culture (Hall, 1976, p. 220). People from one community tend to not speak others’ cultural languages (Hall, 1959, p. 183): “Different speech communities have different (...) cultural scripts that reflect that culture’s expectations and norms” (Remland & Jones, 2022, p. 1268).

Considering the unconscious aspects of culture are learned (Hall, 1959, pp. 68, 71-74), individuals can be unaware of their own set of behavioral rules coming from the social groups they belong: “Only when these rules are broken [people] realize they exist” (p. 69). If one does not know about the governing laws of one cultural system (Hall, 1976, p. 166), it might be much more challenging to “accept the reality of the other’s unconscious culture” (p. 162). Cultural projection happens at the level of unconscious culture, when there is the tendency to believe that all cultures are the same after the visible differences are pointed out, like “political, economic, operational, or personality traits” (Hall, 1976, p. 164). An example is when missionaries use “English syntax to teach Japanese”, or when businessmen do not try to change their behavior overseas because they disregard sales success as “a matter of manners” (Hall, 1976, p. 164). If someone denies there are differences with individuals from another culture, it is clear those differences did not yet come to the scene (Hall, 1976, p. 162).

When trying to transmit a message to someone whose cultural background is different, cultural chocks and misunderstandings usually happen due to the common assumption that both groups have the same human nature of shared behavior (Hall, 1959, p. 43). Because social behavior is learned and culture reproduces itself, certain behaviors belong specifically to certain groups of people (Hall, 1959, p. 43). Professor LaRay M. Barna (1994), therefore, came up with six Stumbling Blocks of Intercultural Communication. They are 1) the Assumption of Similarities, 2) Language Differences, 3) Nonverbal Misinterpretations, 4) Preconceptions and Stereotypes, 5) Tendency to Evaluate, and 6) High Anxiety.

The first stumbling block, assuming similarities instead of differences, happens when people fall into the assumption that “since the foreign person is dressed appropriately and



speaks some of the language”, the “nonverbal codes, thoughts, and feelings” will be the same for both parties (Barna, 1994, p. 338). Novinger confirms that idea:

People tend to see what they expect to see (...). The different cultural identities of two persons attempting to communicate will encourage each to perceive the other as having group attributes, rather than as being a unique person. Preconceptions can be positive or negative, but a significant problem they present in intercultural communication is that preconceptions often lie outside of awareness. (2021, p. 29)

The second block, Language Differences, goes beyond vocabulary, syntax, idioms, slangs, and dialects (Barna, 1994, p. 340). These differences refer to when the literal use of the language conflicts, like ‘yes’ and ‘no’ having different (or opposite) meanings (Barna, 1994, p. 340). Because for some cultures it is polite to refuse first or second offers (e.g., ‘do you want some coffee?’, ‘would you eat more?’), other cultures only consider the first refusal or acceptance: The literal meaning of ‘no’ is taken, but not the common ‘polite’ usage of ‘no’ (Barna, 1994, p. 340). Hall (1959, p. 35) confirms Barna (1994, p. 340) when he stated that “when someone says ‘yes’ it often doesn’t mean yes at all, and when people smile it doesn’t always mean (...) they are pleased.” The Language Differences relate to the idea that, although Sherlock Holmes masters problem-solving in England, he would be clueless about how to act in Japan: Only his Japanese peers could master problem-solving in Japan (Hall, 1959, p. 35). That is, as inner members of Japanese society, born and raised in that community, they know the rules better than the outsiders (Hall, 1959, p. 35).

The third intercultural stumbling block, Nonverbal Misinterpretations, refers to the various sensory realities of different cultures (Barna, 1994, p. 341). People use their five senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing) only to notice what is relevant to their own culture (Barna, 1994, p. 341). That is, they interpret foreign nonverbals based on their sensory understanding from back home. While in America, for example, a man smoothing back his hair might sign nervousness, in Saudi Arabia it might sign he likes a woman (Barna, 1994, p. 341). Nonverbal misinterpretations equal “the lack of comprehension of nonverbal signs and symbols that are easy to observe,” such as gestures, postures, and body movements (Barna, 1994, p. 341). Their meanings, nevertheless, can usually be informally learned (Barna, 1994, p. 341). The difficulty, however, lies in correctly observing “the unspoken codes of the other culture that are less obvious,” like time management, proximities, and formalities (Barna, 1994, p. 341).

The fourth block, Preconceptions and Stereotypes, touches on the labels one has when thinking about the unfamiliar (Barna, 1994, p. 341). Stereotypes are exaggerated, pre-owned assumptions that support sense-making of one's surroundings (Barna, 1994, p. 341). Though they can be incorrect, stereotypes prevail "because they are firmly established as myths (...) by one's own national culture" (Barna, 1994, p. 341). They are also considered rationalized prejudices, being supported by "the tendency to perceive selectively only those pieces of new information that correspond to the image held" (Barna, 1994, p. 341). At some point, the beholder's stereotypes can become one's reality: The Asian used to values of self-denial and self-help might "experience American culture as materialistic and wasteful" (Barna, 1994, p. 341).

There is, nevertheless, a difference between stereotypes and profiles of national character. Perceived identities in a national culture exist due to similar life experiences, considering that these directly influence behavior and shape personality profiles, characteristics, and values (Novinger 2021, p. 29). There are, of course, individual differences, and not all people from a cultural group behave the same. Still, "most members of a given culture share many aspects of behavior to varying degrees" (Novinger, 2021, p. 29). Novinger (2021, p. 29) calls such shared aspects a national character profile. It is a misconception to believe that national character profiles are stereotypes of a society (Novinger, 2021, p. 30). National characters are used to understand different cultures through the system of classifications and common behaviors, beliefs, and values (Lewis, 1996, p. 29). Even if an individual mismatches their national profile, the national profile will still apply to society (Novinger, 2021, p. 30). On the contrary, stereotypes may be called cultural caricatures and they "apply to only a few people of a culture but are attributed to most" (Novinger, 2021, p. 30).

The fifth intercultural stumbling block, Tendency to Evaluate, tells the tendency to endorse or dislike other groups' behavior (Barna, 1994, p. 342). Instead of trying to understand and connect with foreigners' habits or statements, one ends up judging and focusing on their differences (Barna, 1994, p. 342). Lastly, the sixth block, High Anxiety, often involves the other five, being the high level of stress and tension caused by the uncertainty of dealing with unknown cultures (Barna, 1994, p. 343). Barna (1994, p. 343) states that in attempting to lessen the anxiety of interacting with an unfamiliar culture, possible defense mechanisms are stereotypes and assumptions of similarities with the

foreign. The “aura of similarity” is, therefore, a “protection from the stress” of acknowledging and adapting to differences (Barna, 1994, p. 343).

It is interesting to connect Barna’s (1994) intercultural assumptions to Nisbett’s (2003). As the first stumbling block suggests the assumption of similarities, it would be easy to believe that cognitive processes are the same all over the world, just because all people have brains (Shaules & Van der Pol, 2022). But one tends to forget there’s a difference between brain and cognition: The brain refers to the physical organ in the skull, while cognition is the workings of the brain, a synonym for the networks of neurons (Shaules & Van der Pol, 2022). The cognitive processes produce our thoughts and feelings, and how we experience the world, the brain is the organ where the cognitive processes take place (Shaules & Van der Pol, 2022). Intercultural miscommunication, therefore, might happen due to the unseen patterns of the mind (Nisbett, 2003), for culture is not only visual but subjective and unconscious (Hall, 1976, p. 152; Shaules, 2007, p. 40). Like someone’s mother language, culture is mental (Nisbett, 2003, pp. 51-53). In other words, one of the reasons for cultural misunderstandings could be the supposition that people from diverse nationalities have similar values, thoughts, and beliefs (similar inner realities) because they all share the brain as a common organ. Since one presupposes cultures consist of tangible differences (traditions, costumes, food, dance, architecture), one might also disregard the deeper and more impacting aspects of culture: The patterns of people’s minds which are unseen to the eyes (Shaules & Van der Pol, 2022).

To successfully navigate through different cultural dimensions, Kim (2014, p. 533) suggests that a layperson in intercultural communication should develop new skills by “actively participating in interactions with culturally or ethnically dissimilar individuals.” It could be a tricky suggestion, considering that culture is unconscious to men (Hall, 1976, p. 152). If the parties are unaware of the patterns of their minds (Nisbett, 2003), it might be much more difficult to decipher a foreign pattern of inner realities. Besides, one’s level of anxiety, stress, and tension often increase when dealing with the unfamiliar (Barna, 1994, 343). Kim (2014, p. 533) also proposes to “try cognitively to put aside [the] preconceived stereotypical notions about their cultural or ethnic groups” and to be “attentive to the particularities of each person’s verbal and nonverbal messages.” If Barna (1994, p. 343) defines stereotypes as defense mechanisms to deal with the unfamiliar, cognitively putting them aside might not be enough, for a defense mechanism is already “a mental process initiated unconsciously to avoid experiencing conflict or anxiety”

(Oxford Languages, 2023). Secondly, observing verbal and nonverbal messages might not be enough because their meanings change culturally (Barna, 1994, p. 340; Hall, 1959, p. 35).

While scholars in the intercultural communication field may know about cultural dimensions and the hidden aspects of culture, laypersons are probably clueless about the subject. Therefore, simply participating in interactions with dissimilar individuals, as Kim (2014) suggests, might not be enough. A solution for when laypersons on intercultural communication interact with foreign cultures might be focusing on the social expectations at play (Burgoon, 2015), as well as being willing to relearn the rules of the social game instead of eluding oneself of similarities with the unfamiliar (Barna, 1994, p. 338).

### **3 Methodology: Intercultural Communication Challenges of a Multinational**

As an example of intercultural communication challenges, the case of a multinational has been analyzed. In this company, a local team was based in Germany in order to deliver projects to local customers. This local unit was complemented by remote teams, based in Romania and India to support the local project delivery activities. This mixed service delivery setup was mainly implemented to ensure the company's flexibility and profitability. During the project delivery activities, the German and Indian teams were facing several communication challenges. This was partially leading to productivity issues, motivation decrease, and even to increased costs.

To further improve communication among the three teams, interviews were conducted with 23 members both of the German and Indian teams (thirteen interviewees from the Indian team, nine from the German). Their job roles consisted of Project Managers, People Managers, Solution Integrators, Solution Architects, and Test Managers. The Romanian team was also initially considered for the interviews, but to keep this bachelor's research concise the focus remained on the Germany-India relationship. Though the German team had members of other nationalities, mostly European, the prevailing ways of working were German (e.g., time orientation, communication, work-related/personal-private orientation, planning, and power distance).

One hour was booked for each interviewee, and the questionnaire from Appendix I was prepared beforehand. Nevertheless, the questions were used as a guideline, not all questions were necessarily asked. The surveys followed the form of open conversations, and none of the sessions were recorded. Notes were taken lively, during the interviews. The interviews' results were evaluated and classified according to Philipp Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis. Though all cultural theories mentioned in this thesis were considered, only three theories and three classifications were identified in the employees' utterances: Erin Meyer's Culture Map (2014), Hofstede's Cultural Dimension (2010), and the Richard Lewis Model (1996). Erin Meyer's (2014) classifications relate to Scheduling, Communication, and Trusting. The taxonomies from Hofstede (2010) are Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, and Individualism. The Richard Lewis (1996) Model confirms the overall difference regarding the ways of behaving among German and Indian cultures. According to Lewis (1996), Germany fits under the Linear-Active category, while India has characteristics of Multi-Active and Reactive categories, being between both.

#### **4. Interview Results and Application of Cultural Taxonomies**

The cultural dimensions identified in the interviewee's utterances come from the studies of Erin Meyer (2014), Geert Hofstede (2010), and Richard Lewis (1996). The fact that the German and Indian working cultures have opposite characteristics might raise some challenges when they interact. The interviews' results indicate that considering the social orientation of their nations are completely different, some of the miscommunication problems from both teams might indeed have come mostly from the hidden aspects of culture. In addition, the interviews also indicated a certain fear of failure by the Indian team, which can be confirmed by the studies of Heinze et al. (2022). First, this section will explain the cultural classifications identified in the interviews while unveiling examples of misunderstandings within both teams. Second, it briefly uses Richard Lewis Model to confirm the assumptions of opposite cultural interaction between Germany and India. Thirdly, it considers how Indians might have more fear of failure than Germans, which eventually affects work. The next section explores how a multinational might deal with intercultural misunderstandings and expectations. Finally, the cultural classifications of the interviews are in Appendix II. To preserve the anonymity of the company as well as the interviewees, no interview reference number is indicated throughout this thesis.

The interviews' results classified Germany and India as indicated on Table 1 (Meyer, 2014; Hofstede, 2010).

The first cultural dimension, Scheduling, refers to how people understand the concept of time, “the state of mind that affects” how someone organizes their day and runs meetings, for example (Meyer, 2014, p. 219). Meyer (2014, p. 227) divides Scheduling into two categories, Linear Time vs. Flexible Time, as Figure 4 (2014, p. 227) indicates. For Linear Time countries, like Germany, projects follow a linear chain, and 'one thing at a time' tends to be the priority (Meyer, 2014, p. 227). What one prizes the most is fulfilling deadlines, following schedules, and “good organization over flexibility” (Meyer, 2014, p. 227). On the other hand, in Flexible Time countries, like India, multitasking usually takes place (Meyer, 2014, p. 227). Project action steps are random, not necessarily following a sequential chain, and value flexibility over organization (Meyer, 2014, p. 227).

Table 1. Interview Results: Cultural Classifications of Germany and India

Cultural Dimension	Country Classification	
	Germany	India
1. Scheduling	Linear-Time	Flexible-Time
2. Communicating	Low-Context Communication	High-Context Communication
3. Trusting	Task Based	Relationship Based
4. Uncertainty Avoidance	High Uncertainty Avoidance	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
5. Power Distance	Low Power Distance	High Power Distance
6. Individualism	Individualist	Collectivist

Table 1. Based on (Meyer, 2014; Hofstede, 2010)

Considering the Indian team is more used to time flexibility and not linear project action than the German team, which works at a linear time pace, focusing on one project or main task at a time, feelings of mistrust due to time inconsistency might emerge from the Linear Time team. They would question how the Indians use their tempo, if not second-guess their time efficiency. As the German team stated:

They are getting projects from all other teams, then they get overwhelmed by other tasks. By being far away we cannot see what they are doing.

I do not have always visibility of what they are doing.

In Germany, you report all working time, very well detailed and precise. In India, sometimes I have the impression they don't work for two, three days. I have the impression they are doing nothing. The test is over, they are supposed to do something. That's not the way: in Germany, you have to report very detailed. It's always very transparent how many hours you spent for the company every day. That's very sensitive here in Germany. We wonder how it is normal for them to be flexible with time - that's impossible in Germany. When an hour is not detailed reported I have a bad conscience about the time reporting [*Schlechtes Gewissen*]. For them being imprecise with time reporting is not cheating, for me, it's cheating.

Figure 4. Scheduling



Figure 4. Source: (Meyer, 2014, p. 227)

From the Indian side, however, they are not working less or skipping working hours. Their perception would be that the German team is inflexible, that they do one thing at a time, and their working time consists of fixed hours. Unlike the Germans, Indians do not mind having adaptive working hours, not necessarily having their office hours from 09:00 to 17:00:

In Germany, the deadlines are not flexible. (Indian team interviewee)

Germans work fewer hours, but they are more effective in how they use their time. They are focused on the working time. They start work at 07:30 and finish at 17:00. Indians start at 09:00, take breaks in-between and end up working until late at night. (Indian team interviewee)

It's normal that people get 3 projects at a time [in India]. There are times when people even work at weekends. (...) Generally, people work 12 hours a day, and

some people even work on weekends to get their projects done. Germans stop working from 09:00-17:00, and that's it. (Indian team interviewee)

The Linear Time team's inability to multitask leads them to question the attentiveness of the Flexible Time team. As interviewee 23 stated: "When we touch a topic for someone specific, they don't pay attention. I say, 'Hello?,' they say, 'Sorry, what is the question?'" The impression is they maybe are overwhelmed with work, and they are doing something else." However, the Indian team remarks that:

Working parallel is common in India. Maybe the meeting is not for you, but you have to be there (it's again the feeling that you cannot say 'no'). Then people tend to use their time while being in the meeting. Multitasking is common in India. It's not common in Germany, but that's very common in India.

I did not know how to set my priorities - everything is important. Then my manager told me, 'Your first priority is your first project, when something else comes, then work on the other projects'. Indians manage to do so much at the same time.

We [Indians] do parallel working. Automated tasks, for example, you can always do that in the background of a meeting. Something that needs your attention, whatever it could be done parallel, we do that, like copying files or automated scripts. I do my work parallel and listen to them, from time to time. That's normal for even other Indians. People repeat the same because they work in parallel. They won't say they were working in the background.

The second Cultural Dimension identified in the interviews was on Communicating (Meyer, 2014, p. 39), which has to do with how direct and precise people use words. Though Meyer (2014, p. 41) divides societies between high or low-context communicators, it was Edward T. Hall who first developed the terms. As Figure 5 (Meyer, 2014, p. 39) denotes, high-context countries, like India, tend to speak between the lines. They "rely more on the unspoken messages embedded in a particular context" (Remland & Jones, 2022, p. 1268). Communication is indirect and meaning lies in the context (Meyer, 2014, p. 39). The listener and speaker should pay attention to the context, and being direct might be considered rude (Meyer, 2014, p. 39). Because people tend to grasp information by the context and messages are implicitly delivered, high-context communication tends to be short, and people tend to 'read between the lines' (Meyer, 2014, p. 39).

Low-context cultures, on the other hand, use more verbal communication to get messages delivered (Remland & Jones, 2022, p. 1268). Communicating clearly means relying on the literal meaning of the delivered message, the sense of "say what you mean, and mean



what you say” (Toomey & Dorjee, 2017, p. 150). Indirect ‘no’s, for example, are “common throughout Asia” (Meyer, 2014, p. 50). As noted by Meyer (2014, p. 51), Questions like ‘Will the testing be done until tomorrow?’ or ‘Can you do this task?’ may be answered with ‘It is very challenging, but I’ll try’ or ‘I have extra work at the moment, but I’ll think about it.’ Such indirect denial is even confirmed by the Indian team interviewed:

If it’s wrong, we say it in a polite manner. ‘I have different perceptions = no.’ ‘It is not correct = no.’ This is the way of explaining something to the other guy. In India it’s a bit rude to directly say ‘no.’

A good answer means when words are indirect. ‘I’ll come back to you’ is a soft ‘no.’

Indians saying no is very rare. ‘We do it later = no.’ (...) ‘I’ll do it later’ means he is not interested to do it. Indians feel like ‘no’ means being rude.

According to Ting-Toomey & Dorjee (2017, p. 150), for someone to interpret whether a statement relates to a low-context or high-context talk, one needs intercultural knowledge, pragmatic linguistics (the awareness of how the context favors meaning), and interpersonal competencies.

Figure 5. Communicating



Figure 5. Source: (Meyer, 2014, p. 39)

It can happen that, since Indians tend to be indirect and Germans direct, without the understanding of high-context/low-context concepts an Indian might perceive Germans as rude, and a German might perceive Indians as vague or confusing. It can also be that

low-context Germans see high-context Indians as speakers hiding information (work-related data, for example). These different cultural perceptions may raise the level of mistrust from both teams, as some interviewees indicate:

Germans are very direct. I thought they were even rude. (Indian team interviewee)

Indians hide information from Germans. (German team interviewee)

I feel like they hide information from us. We engage with these people from a technical core of view. They don't want to teach us what they know, otherwise we wouldn't need them. (German team interviewee)

In Germany we say one sentence, but they [Indians] tend to speak a poem instead of one sentence for the same scenario. (German team interviewee)

Unlikely hiding information, the Indian team, however, shows a willingness to cooperate with the German team and a concern with not being perceived as rude:

We are one company. We work as one team. We try to give answers. (Indian team interviewee)

We want to support them [the German team]. We give services to people. We are bound to give services to them. We have the feeling of not saying 'no' upfront, our goal is to help the German team and support them. (Indian team interviewee)

Nobody is rude to the face in India. People will speak between the lines. In Germany, sometimes people are rude in the face. I doubt that is possible to explain to a German to read between the lines. (Indian team interviewee)

Meyer's (2014, p. 171) third cultural classification is Trusting. As Figure 6 (Meyer, 2014, p. 171) indicates, this dimension relates to how people build trust at work. In Task-based countries like Germany, trust comes from tasks' success, consistency, and reliability (Meyer, 2014, p. 171). People tend to separate personal from professional, and trust is built based on business activities only, not on private hangouts to build relationships, like dinners and leisure time (Meyer, 2014, p. 171). Otherwise, in Relationship-based countries like India, trust is built not based on tasks, but on relationships (Meyer, 2014, p. 171). Sharing meals, having drinks, and spending time together are key factors for building relationships (Meyer, 2014, p. 171). It is when "cognitive and affective trust are woven together in business" (Meyer, 2014, p. 171).

Opposed to task-centered Germany, relationships are extremely important in India, and the interviews also induce such belief:

Initially I had trouble talking to people based in Germany. (...) Some people are very straight to the point. In India, you first ask ‘How are you?’, talk about people’s life, and then you ask for something related to work. In Germany, they speak about work directly. (Indian team interviewee)

They [Germans] do not try to build relationships and connect. A 30-minute meeting is effective and straight to the point [there is not much space for ‘Hello, how are you doing?’]. (...) Our [Indian] culture is more about building relationships, instead of being practical and straight to the point. Germans say no and are rude, and the next moment they act as if something never happened. They separate issues. In India, if I don’t have a good relationship with you, then that’s always in my mind. We [Indians] cannot separate the relationship from work. It’s not the same way with them [Germans]: When something happens, they leave it behind and move forward. For me, when a relationship is lost, it is lost, and it is hard to have it back. (Indian team interviewee)

Figure 6. Trusting



Figure 6. Source: (Meyer, 2014, p. 171)

The German and Indian employees with little intercultural misunderstandings had stronger relationship ties. That also led to better work performance, like delivery of tasks and more open conversations:

I wanted to get closer to them, I didn’t know them. I started to invest in private relations. We had one-on-one meetings; we talked about families and private life, to get to know them. I’m interested in their private lives. I added them on Facebook. (German team interviewee)

They [Indians] have so much trust in me now that they feel they can correct me. I know some people from my team for 3 years. They are free to correct me, but

these are the particular people who are working with me for a long time. (German team interviewee)

Nevertheless, as an Indian interviewee suggests, the “Feeling of [someone being] rude leads to not great commitment at work [from the Indian side].” The interviewees from the German team who started to lose trust in the Indians had weak relationship ties (the case of interviewees 15, 22, and 23). The team members from Germany expected to build trust based on the delivery of tasks, not at all considering their interaction at the relationship level:

[Indians] don’t have the feelings of relationships with us. They deliver with poor quality or deliver incompletely. (...) If you nail down your questions, you get the real answer. We start losing trust and respect for them.

I do not feel like I know them [my Indian team], not at all. If you don’t talk technically, they don’t talk at all. They don’t talk about private stuff. (...) I faced the situation when I explained a task to [Indian] colleagues and it seemed my counterpart was not understanding it. You lose trust after postponing the tasks. I start second-guessing their skills. He says he can fix it quickly, but he didn’t solve the problem. Because they do not tell me clearly what’s going on, my trust is shaken.

Germans separate professional from personal. If they [Indians] cannot do so, that’s not my problem. (...) As long as they [Indians] deliver, that’s good enough.

The other three cultural dimensions identified in the interviewees’ speech come from Hofstede (2010), and they are: Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, and Individualism, as Figure 7 (Hofstede, 2022) shows.

The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension indicates how much people feel threatened by uncertain situations and how they deal with the unknown (Hofstede, 2010, p. 191). Societies can be considered as having weak or strong levels of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2010, p. 203). For the ones with weak levels, uncertainties as normal, “and each day is accepted as it comes” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 203). People tend to be comfortable dealing with unfamiliar risks, like the change of jobs (Hofstede, 2010, p. 198, not feeling “threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (p. 191). Also, the rules change according to the people’s necessity, “if it is evident that [they] cannot be respected” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 228).

Figure 7. Country Comparison: Germany and India

## Country Comparison: Gemany and India

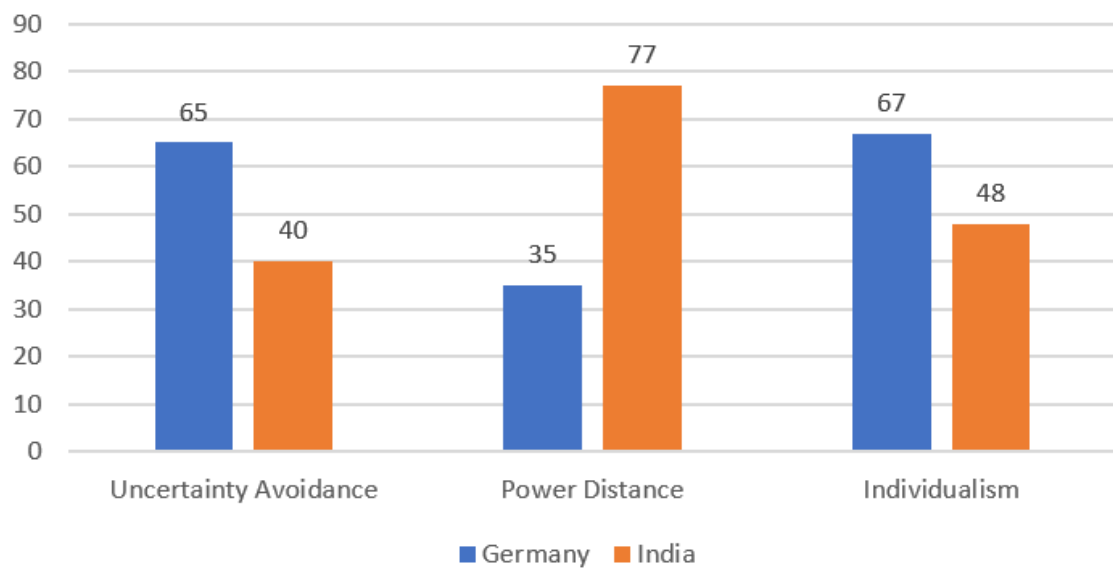


Figure 7. Based on (Hofstede Insights, 2022)

On the other hand, societies with high levels of uncertainty avoidance have greater “fear of ambiguous situations and (...) unfamiliar risks” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 203). Since unknown situations as threats, they must be fought (Hofstede, 2010, p. 197). To avoid uncertainties, they tend to need many precise rules, like laws, norms, and religion (Hofstede, 2010, p. 189). At the workplace, besides the “need for precision and formalization”, there are “fewer changes of employer” and longer periods of services, with people being motivated by a certain sense of security (Hofstede, 2010, p. 217).

While India is considered an uncertainty-accepting country, Germany is uncertainty-avoiding (Hofstede Insights, 2022). Since the resilience level between both cultures is diverse, Indians might see Germans as inflexible, while Germans would see Indians as unstructured and unable to long-term plan. As the interviews indicate,

in Germany, the deadlines are not flexible. (...) I never faced a situation where Germans didn't show up in a meeting without notice in advance. That can happen with Indians, not with Germans. In India, if you're not able to attend the meeting, you explain it later. You drop a message before, and that's okay. It happens every time. (Indian team interviewee)

Germans are very strict about time. In India, it is more flexible. Due to environmental factors, we cannot be Germans – that is simply not possible. Traffic, for example, is very, very bad. We cannot even blame someone because he is not on time. Knowing this, people are then okay with being late to the office or meetings. If it's beyond control, then you are helpless. We cannot blame

someone for something it's not about him, but the environment. Another environmental factor beyond our control is the weather – we have strong rains in India. (Indian team interviewee)

An Indian guy from our team goes to church and he simply doesn't show up in our meetings. I would expect him to at least say that on Friday he would be off praying. They should inform us about the future. He didn't even say that he wouldn't show up, he just left. (German team interviewee)

Indians tend to tell me one day before, 'I'll take after tomorrow off.' They do it randomly. They do not have that forward-thinking on the future. (German team interviewee)

It's hard to believe their time planning. We have quick double-checks before the meetings – to check the holidays. They never talk about their holidays. (German team interviewee)

Though they [Indians] try thinking about the next steps, future tasks, possible risks, and how to mitigate those risks, they can't. (...) We are trying to plan, so we look multiple weeks ahead. But out of a sudden, they [Indians] are offline: 'I cannot work tomorrow', they say. I can count on them, but it's really a struggle to plan. (...) Though they are unstructured, they are committed to work. (German team interviewee)

While it might sound nonsense to the methodic planning Germans (Lewis, 1996, p. 33) to live without considering the long-term, Indians tend to see it as normal:

In India, we have completely different holidays - what matters for the South might not matter for the North. There might be some confusions about holidays and plannings. Planning never happens 3-6 months ahead in India. I plan with 2 weeks in advance. Nobody plans 6 months ahead, only if you're flying abroad. 3 weeks ahead is already too much. (Indian team interviewee)

Basically, in the morning, I plan the day ahead. I plan today and tomorrow. I never plan 3 or 6 months ahead. I plan what's in my control. (Indian team interviewee)

A second cultural misunderstanding might be Germans seeing Indians as uncommitted to their employers and/or services, considering they would change jobs at a faster pace than Germans. As an interview with the German team suggests, "They [Indians] do not have this feeling of belonging: They are constantly changing jobs, they have nothing holding them back." According to an Indian interviewee, nevertheless,

in India, people want to work for small assignments, but that's not the same in Germany (preference of 3 years in Germany equals a preference of 3 months in India). Because the power distance is very high in India, there's a big difference between the salaries of engineers and managers – opportunities closer to the customers are better. The more experiences one has, the better it is for him to

increase his job position. This hierarchical prospective might lead to Indians changing jobs quickly and getting preference for smaller projects – more projects mean more experience. When I worked as an engineer, my intention was never to stay with the big projects. People are keen to take many types of work.

Though some societies are more unequal than others, inequalities exist in them all (Hofstede, 2010, p. 54). The dimension of Power Distance relates to how the less powerful members of organizations expect and embrace the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, 2010, p. 61). In societies with small power distance, like Germany, power is more horizontally distributed, with no big gap in salary ranges (Hofstede, 2010, pp. 73, 75). It is common that “subordinates and superiors [to] consider each other existentially equal” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 74). In a nutshell, small power distance countries tend to think that (10 Minutes With, 2014) everybody is under the same rules of law; independence is one of the most important things for a child to learn; decentralization is the best; and when work-related, subordinates expect to be consulted, for they have autonomy to create orders.

In societies with high power distance, like India, power is more vertically distributed (Hofstede, 2010, p. 75). A direct bottom-up approach, from subordinates to superiors, is very unlikely to happen (Hofstede, 2010, p. 61). Large salary differences are common, and “subordinates expect to be told what to do” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 73). Large power distance countries tend to accept that (10 Minutes With, 2014) some people are privileged, others not; respect for the elders is one of the most important things for a child to learn; centralization is the best; and when work-related, subordinates assume they will be told what to do, for they would rather follow orders. In sum, hierarchies matter.

While individuals in low-power distance might expect to openly talk to their superiors, that is even unthinkable to individuals from high-power distance societies. When working together, for example, a German project manager might expect integrators from India to speak truth to power and give them open feedback, like in a peer-to-peer relationship, disregarding top-down approaches. Indians, however, might never fulfill that expectation:

Direct feedback doesn't exist to managers. They give feedback to us, but not us to them. (Indian team interviewee)

Seniors are listened more than the juniors in India. It's hard to speak to senior positions – speak truth to power is difficult. I believe it comes from the caste system. That's it, we need to work with that. (Indian team interviewee)

[In India, feedback] usually comes from your manager. I cannot talk to my manager in a certain way. (...) Indians look at the hierarchies. In India, nobody bypasses the hierarchies. If my manager says something, I follow because I don't want any trouble in the future. I don't want to break the relationship with my manager, so people tend to follow what their manager says. In India, feedback is always top down, never bottom up. Peer to peer feedback is less. (Indian team interviewee)

We [Indians] are not saying 'no' to the seniors, we have to be diplomatic. (Indian team interviewee)

If someone speaks openly with their manager, they [managers] could understand in a wrong way. Managers might not understand us, so it's better not to speak. It's better to hide the problem. (Indian team interviewee)

When giving peer-to-peer feedback, the feedback giver might even not feel heard, as was the case of an interviewee from the German team: "I don't give feedback anymore – nobody [from the Indian team] listens. They [Indians] don't listen to my feedback." But as an Indian interviewee pointed out, "In India, feedback is always top-down." Also, regarding problem-solving, small power distance Germany tends to deal with issues at a lower level, without the need for involving the management team:

Involving the manager in a misunderstanding with a colleague sounds like an escalation in Germany – also adding people in cc to an email seems unnecessary. I'm not adding the manager to solve my issues, I don't need my manager to do my mediator for me. (German team interviewee)

A second cultural misunderstanding relates to Germans complaining that Indians are not accountable or independent with their work, or even insecure to take decisions. They would rather follow precisely the German demand instead of 'thinking and deciding for themselves.' Some of the considerations of the German team were:

Our company's philosophy is supposed to have independent work. I'm not supposed to work teaching them [Indians] about things.

They often don't take themselves accountable for their work.

I also have the impression they [Indians] are scared of the customer. They are afraid of speaking their minds in front of the customer. Engineering and troubleshooting guys usually don't speak their minds. Maybe they don't feel comfortable, maybe they feel insecure. They need my approval to say something to the customers. They also don't ask the customers when they don't understand the task.

Don't rely on me to tell them everything.



Indians don't take responsibility. They do what I say. Therefore, I take the responsibility for what I'm asking. Too much asking, too shy just to try something. They always want to hear from us, 'yes', a confirmation. We need you to think, to use the brain, not to do what we say. As a German, I should not give too many orders to colleagues.

[My Indian team] call me out of a sudden, even though they already know the outcome. They want my confirmation for what they did. I have the feeling that I'm always checking and not progressing at all. Seems like they are insecure.

Since Indians are mostly oriented by big power gaps at the workplace, they value more obedience than autonomy (Hofstede, 2010, p. 72). It is not that Indians are not accountable: They actually expect to receive top-down orders rather than act autonomously (Hofstede, 2010, p. 76). As the interviews with the Indian team indicate:

Clear instructions and clear guidelines are very important in India. There's no such thing as 'doing your own way.' If you have your 'own way,' you have to get approval from the management, not the colleagues. The colleagues are the ones who you discuss things with, the managers are the ones who approve things.

I have the impression Indians feel insecure when facing the whites because of a lack of exposure to their culture. They do not know the European culture, so there's a certain inferiority complex.

A possible third cultural misunderstanding is rooted in the delegation of tasks. As an Indian interviewee stated, "All people are not equal." That belief might lead to a clearer delegation of tasks, distinguishing seniors from juniors. But Germans might not share that same conviction:

If I assign one activity to you, I expect you to do it – you would not make it with others' support. But in India, they assign the activity to the upper or lower level: 'I'm a senior, I don't do it. That task should go to someone lower than me.' Here in Germany, our very expert guys also have to do simple things. (German team interviewee)

There are some tasks that they [Indians] don't even want to do. For example, easy tasks are not done by high positions, they seem to think, 'I'm too good for that.' (German team interviewee)

The last cultural dimension this thesis considers is Individualism (Hofstede, 2010, p. 90). This taxonomy relates to how much individually or group-oriented people are: The "role of the individual versus the role of the group" (Hofstede, 2010, p. 90). Societies can be individualists or collectivists (Hofstede, 2010, p. 91). In Individualistic societies,

individual interests tend to “prevail over the interests of the group” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 91). People think in terms of ‘I’ identity; the competition is more about individuals; in the matter of priorities, tasks come first, and relationships come second<sup>1</sup> (Hofstede, 2010, p. 124). Since “the ties between individuals are loose” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 92), ‘I’ matters more than ‘we’ (2010, p. 117), and “speaking one’s mind is a virtue, (...) [a] characteristic of a sincere and honest person” (2010, p. 107). Low-context communication also tends to be more used: Things must be specified, listed, named, and clarified (Hofstede, 2010, p. 109).

In Collectivist societies, people think in terms of ‘we’ identity (Hofstede, 2010, p. 113). The competition is not between individuals, but between groups, tribes, and families: Belonging to a group is “the major source of one’s identity and the only secure protection one has against the hardships of life” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 91). Besides relationships being prioritized over tasks (Hofstede, 2010, p. 124), “family celebrations and observances such as baptisms, marriages, and, especially, funerals are extremely important and should not be missed” (2010, p. 108). In addition, collectivistic cultures tend to rely more on high-context communication (Hofstede, 2010, p. 109).

It can happen that individualist societies like Germany are unable to conceive the values of collectivist societies like India. As the interviewees from the German team stated:

With Indians there are so many family dramas happening – weddings, moving homes, getting sick (sometimes I feel like the same person is getting married 3 times).

When they say something, they say ‘We have done something,’ not ‘I did something.’ Who on earth is ‘we?’

Indians, on the contrary, are very clear about the importance of ‘we:’

When working as a team, it’s always ‘we.’ The customer will never see you as ‘I.’ Our company is ‘we,’ it’s a team, a big team. You’re not presenting your individuality. It’s good to say ‘we.’ We should avoid ‘I,’ it’s a self-centered tone when ‘we’ is not used. I go with ‘we’ always. Even if I did something on my own, unconsciously someone might have helped me (like the info we get from the database). Sounds good when we say ‘we,’ ‘I’ doesn’t sound well when you write a professional email. When we are working as a team, ‘we’ matters more than ‘I.’ We cannot operate single, never. It’s always ‘we’ as a team.

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<sup>1</sup> A concept similar to the Trusting cultural taxonomy already explained: Building trust is whether based on accomplishments of tasks or on relationships (Meyer, 2014, p. 171).

When you do something, say ‘we,’ not ‘I.’ Anytime there’s a team, there’s a ‘we.’

‘We’ is always preferred than I. Even if you are working alone, you have to plan together.

Since Indians have greater concern about belonging to a group as well as what the group would think of them individually, they might feel shy to speak up in big meetings. Individualistic Germans, however, tend to be direct regardless of what the group would think of them, for they are not group oriented (they do not mind belonging to a group). As two Indian colleagues stated:

We [Indians] don’t talk much on bigger forums - we have the feeling of, ‘What if I say something wrong, and people take it wrongly?’ (Indian team interviewee)

It's better to speak individually than in group calls. Speaking in the middle of everyone feels like being juggled, somehow. Out of the fear of me being misunderstood, I prefer to talk to you one-on-one. (Indian team interviewee)

To summarize all the differences presented in the six cultural taxonomies, the application of Richard Lewis’ (1996) model might be useful. According to Lewis’ LMR Profile (linear/multi/reactive) indicated by Figure 3<sup>2</sup> (Lewis, 1996, p. 42), Germany is Linear-Active (1996, p. 42). India, however, has characteristics of both Multi-Active and Reactive countries (India is the exact middle point between Multi-Active and Reactive). The cultural traits presented throughout this section and identified in the interviews are translated according to the LMR Profile and indicated in Table 2 (Lewis, 1996, p. 33-34).

It is also interesting to notice that the Indian team had a higher level of fear of failure, as the answers from Appendix III show. Among 50 other countries, the 2020 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor classified India as the nation ranking the highest on fear of failure (Heinze et al., 2022, p. 9). In India, around 62.4% of individuals would avoid starting a business out of fear of failing, while in Germany the number drops to 29.5% (Heinze et al., 2022, p. 9). The research conducted by Heinze *et al.* (2022, pp. 8-9) suggests that the high-power distance in India, as well as its collectivist societal orientation, might be factors influencing high levels of fear of failure. Germany, on the other hand, consists of an individualistic society with more of an equal distribution of power (Heinze et al., 2022, p. 8). While in high power distance societies one tends to

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<sup>2</sup> Figure 3 from page 9.

avoid failures at all costs, in low power distance societies one tends to be more accepting to admit failures (Heinze et al., 2022, p. 8). An inclination for direct and constant communication between subordinates and superiors take place in small-power-distance societies, not large-power-distance ones (Hofstede, 2010, p. 61).

Table 2. Germany and India Classification According to Richard Lewis

Germany: Linear-Active	India: Multi-Active and Reactive
Plans ahead methodically	Not punctual (Multi-Active)
Does one thing at a time	Timetable unpredictable (Multi-Active)
Works fixed hours	Changes plans (Multi-Active)
Punctual	Juggles facts (Multi-Active)
Sticks to plans	People-oriented (Multi-Active)
Sticks to facts	Emotional (Multi-Active)
Job-oriented	Delegates to relations (Multi-Active)
Unemotional	Talks for hours (Multi-Active)
Likes fixed agendas	Seeks out (top) key person (Multi-Active)
Brief on telephone	Has ready excuses (Multi-Active)
Confronts with logic	Flexible Hours (Reactive)
Separates social/professional	Introvert (Reactive)
	Respectful (Reactive)
	People-oriented (Reactive)
	Protects face of other (Reactive)
	Avoids confrontation (Reactive)
	Doesn't interrupt (Reactive)
	Connects social/professional (Reactive)

Table 2. Based on (Lewis, 1996, p. 33-34)

Bearing in mind that in individualistic societies people prioritize looking after themselves and their direct family, the preoccupation with how one is perceived by a social group is less than in collectivist societies (Heinze et al., 2022, p. 8). Personal opinions exist in individualistic societies, while in collectivist societies “opinions are predetermined by the group” (Hofstede, 2010, p. 107). Collectivist societies, therefore, carry a stronger feeling of being judged by the whole group if mistakes are committed (Hofstede, 2010, p. 110). The concept of feeling ashamed comes from the sense of unfulfilling collective obligations, the idea of, ‘what would others think of me?’ (Hofstede, 2010, p. 110). If the

concern with other people's opinions is greater in collectivist societies (Hofstede, 2010, p. 110), so it will also be the fear of failure (Heinze et al., 2022, p. 8), considering that one would strive for others to perceive them positively, avoiding situations that would make them feel losing face (Hofstede, 2010, p. 110).

Overall, the evidence presented in this section suggests that the German and Indian teams were facing misunderstandings due to cultural differences. Supposing those differences negatively affected their motivation, extra time would be needed for communication to be clear. More procedures and more explanation of tasks would be needed, as well as testing repetitions. Due to missing information, the level of effectiveness and productivity would decrease: Tasks were then taken wrongly, and the action chains were then slow. The business case was then not working as intended, for the offshore services (India team) were not paying off as forecasted. The negative impact on finances then affected the investments of clients and the project profitability of that multinational.

## **5. Recommendations and Improvement Areas**

A possible solution for dealing with intercultural miscommunication is considering one's level of expectations. Since cultures have an unconscious aspect (Hall, 1959), and people's inner realities are not visible (Nisbett, 2003; Shaules, 2007), it might be that successful intercultural communication lies in the awareness of the different levels of expectations (Burgoon, 2015).

Since people are unconscious of the different values and beliefs that they learn in the social environment they grew up (Hall, 1959), it can be pointless to write a set of rules on how to deal with a foreign culture whose hidden aspects are yet to be learned. Richard Lewis also questioned the impossibility of one establishing standard ways (or common truths) to facilitate interaction between diverse cultures:

Can the pedantic, linear German and the voluble, exuberant Brazilian really share a "globalized" view of, for instance, duty, commitments or personnel policies? How do the French reconcile their sense of intellectual superiority with cold Swedish logic or American bottom-line successes? Will Anglo-Saxon hiring and firing procedures ever gain acceptability in people-orientated, multi-active Spain, Portugal or Argentina? When will product-oriented Americans, Britons and Germans come to the realization that products make their own way only in linear-active societies and that relationships pave the way for product penetration in multi-active cultures? (1996, p. 41)

Considering that different cultures have different perceptions of a same outcome (Nisbett, 2003), writing down critical task descriptions and ensuring they are signed off and understood the same way, having regular meetings to review the ways of working, checking if people feel like one team, or even practicing active listening are actions that might lead to nowhere. For example, the outcome of delivering a message from a high-context speaker to a low-context listener may not be successful regardless of establishing standard ways to communicate. The high-context speaker might presume the low-context listener speaks also in a high-context manner (Barna, 1994, p. 340; Hall, 1959, p. 35), therefore information is likely to be lost along throughout the communication process. What might be helpful is when different cultures become aware and accept their differences to deliberately take better actions based on how others perceive them. Based on the interviews and the theories presented in this thesis, suggestions on how both teams could behave to lessen their cultural misunderstandings were developed.

When diverse national backgrounds are disregarded by the speaker or listener, it is unlikely that a message can be transmitted without blurred meanings. According to Paul Watzlawick's (2011, p. 29) first axiom of communication, one cannot not communicate. Even when an individual chooses to be silent, he is already saying something, for "words or silence all have message value" (Watzlawick's, 2011, p. 30). That is, someone's "activity or inactivity" influence how others perceive them, and "these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating" (Watzlawick's, 2011, p. 30). If someone always communicates even with silence (Watzlawick, 2011, p. 30), it is most likely that, in situations involving different intercultural meanings, these meanings will also conflict (Barna, 1994, pp. 340-341). As Watzlawick (2011, pp. 30-31) suggests, even by trying not to communicate, people are already communicating: "Neither can we say that 'communication' only takes place when it is intentional, conscious, or successful, that is, when mutual understanding occurs." The interviews indicated it can happen that when Indians say 'yes,' it does not always mean 'yes' (also confirmed by Hall, 1959, p. 35). For a German, however, the exact meaning lies in the specifically used word: A 'yes' might always mean 'yes,' for Germans tend to 'say what they mean and mean what they say' (Meyer, 2014, p. 35).

A possible answer, therefore, for the impossibility of not communicating even when messages have different meanings due to cultural differences lies in the sense of

expectations. Expectations Violation Theory is a communication theory focused on people's expectations in interpersonal interactions (Burgoon, 2015, p. 2). Attending or violating people's expectations might lead to failure or success within social interactions: "Successful performances depend upon discerning the norms or expectations for a given situation" and fulfilling those expectations (Burgoon, 1995, p. 194). Burgoon defines expectations as "enduring cognitions about the behavior anticipated of others," being the outcome of "social norms in a given situation" (2015, p. 2). When expectancies are violated, then one becomes aware of their existence (Burgoon, 1995, p. 200). Likewise, Hall (1959, chap. 08) also defends that, for someone to become aware of their cultural behavioral pattern, that pattern has to be violated.

Since social norms vary from culture to culture (Hofstede, 2010), an example of intercultural violation of social expectations involves the concept of proxemics (Hall, 1976, pp. 98-100). Proxemics studies how people use "space as a function of culture" (Hall, 1983, p. 231). In other words, proxemics is "the effect of culture on the structuring and use of space," which involves personal distancing (Hall, 1983, p. 231). Feeling comfortable with the use of personal space changes from culture to culture: Americans, for example, "did not like to be approached too closely during conversations and were (...) averse to extensive touching or sensory involvement with people whom they did not know well" (Hall, 1983, p. 153). When personal space invasions happen, that is, when there is the violation of personal space expectations, Burgoon & Jones (1976) indicate there might be negative consequences in a given social interaction; one possible example is social withdrawal or aggressive behavior are possible consequences (Burgoon, 1995, p. 200).

If one expects that completely different people, from completely different nations, have the same or very similar social norms, that might be a root cause for any intercultural misunderstanding. As Burgoon (1995, p. 200) stated, "the countless anecdotes about misunderstandings and failed communication often translate into pitting one culture's norms against the quaint, peculiar, or 'deviant' acts of another culture."

Intercultural communication might be much easier if, when approaching someone from a different culture, one is beforehand assured that their cognitive processes are not the same. If someone jumps into intercultural interactions "assuming that culture doesn't matter, [their] default mechanism will be to view others through [their] own cultural lens and to

judge or misjudge [other nationalities] accordingly” (Meyer, 2014, p. 13). In one of her interviews, Erin Meyer said:

When we’re working on global teams, we need to understand how our actions create perceptions in different parts of the world. Then we can adapt our style and increase our effectiveness. (...) To be a global leader is to know the difference between your own culture and your authentic style, and how to get results in the other culture. That is how you choose to maximize your effectiveness (DAWN, 2017).

It is interesting to notice that, according to Meyer’s speech, perception comes before effectiveness. Before strategizing on how to be more effective, first one might wonder how their actions may be perceived by people from a different culture and then adapt to their expectation. Taking that into account, some self-reflection questions for when working with multinational teams might be:

- Are you aware of your authentic style, your way of doing things? What does it look like?
- From which culture do you come and with which cultures did/do you work? What differences have you noticed so far?
- How do you perceive the other culture you’re working with? How do you think they perceive you?
- You already know how to get results in your own culture. But how can you learn to get results in some other? What could be some practical steps?

Only six dimensions were considered based on the 23 interviews with the employees of a multinational. Those dimensions were repetitively identified in their speech. Nevertheless, if more profound research is conducted involving more interviewees and conducted in a more extensive timeframe, it is likely that other dimensions would also be identified in the participants’ speech, such as Hofstede’s (2010) Masculinity and Indulgence Taxonomies, or Meyer’s (2014) Evaluating and Persuading Taxonomies, for example. Some possible action steps were, therefore, elaborated to smoothen communication between the German and Indian teams, considering the six cultural dimensions explained in Section 4. Because this thesis was written in a Germany-based university, the action steps considered the perspective of the German team. That is, proposing suggestions of how the German team could behave differently towards the Indian team.



### Scheduling (Meyer, 2014)

Since Indians are more malleable than Germans regarding their working office hours, they might not necessarily dislocate from the office to their homes not necessarily at the end of the day (at a linear pace as it tends to happen in Germany): “[In India] there’s one specific time when we leave the office to take less traffic” (Indian team interviewee). Accepting and adapting to the Indian working hours, like scheduling online meetings before or after the Indian team leaves the office or home to avoid traffic, might lead to more punctuality and/or attendance at meetings.

If Muslim Indians go to the Mosque at a certain hour of the day, as the interviews suggest, taking that information into consideration and not scheduling meetings at their prayer time might also lead to more meetings attendance. Considering Indians do not directly speak their minds (they tend not to use low-context communication, ‘say what you mean and mean what you say’) if the German team already knows a bit about the religious practices of Indian colleagues, one could already reconsider their meeting hours. In other words, no matter the reason for Indians not attending meetings or being late (such as traffic or religious practices, for example), a possible solution is the German team to adapt to the reality of Indians having flexible working hours.

### Communicating (Meyer, 2014)

Since Indians tend to value the relationships they have, speaking indirectly is a manner of not being rude nor offending someone. As an Indian interviewee stated, “Nobody is rude on the face in India. People will speak in between the lines. In Germany, sometimes people are rude on the face. I doubt that is possible to explain to a German to read between the lines.” Meyer’s (2014, p. 50) advice for working with high-context cultures is learning “to listen to what is meant instead of what is said.” For more clarification, it might be helpful to ask for more details or make more open-ended questions, for “with persistence, more information will emerge” (Meyer, 2014, pp. 50-51)

### Trusting (Meyer, 2014)

Since Indians are relationship-oriented, actions that Germans could take to boost relationship and friendliness could be adding Indian colleagues on social media (e.g., LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook); exchanging WhatsApp numbers; or even having not only work-related meetings, but casual meetings to talk about other topics that foster building relationship. These casual meetings could be named ‘Coffee Catch Ups’, lasting

around 20 minutes, for example. Discussed topics might include food, Indian festivals, books or movies recommendation, and family updates (like the marriage of a cousin and the graduation of a niece).

As an interviewee from the Indian team confirmed, “It’s good to talk to my German manager. (...) He’s willing to know about India”. Any subject that indicates the German team is open to learn about India will possibly lead to strengthen their relationships, as another German team interviewee was doing: “I wanted to get closer to them (...) I started to invest in private relations. We had one-on-one meetings; we talked about families and private life, to get to know them. I’m interested in their private lives. I added them on Facebook.”

#### Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede, 2010)

Since Germans tend to value planning ahead and Indians do not, the German team could ask where their Indian partners work from (e.g., Delhi, Bangalore, or Kolkata) and inform themselves of the local holidays (directly asking the Indians about their local most relevant festivals or search for the respective local holidays on Google). As an Indian interviewee mentioned, “Indians have a lot of festivals, so they take days off around these holidays.”

It is likely that Indians would not prioritize holiday excel sheets or any sort of long-term planning, considering the words of an Indian interviewee: “Planning never happens 3-6 months ahead in India. I plan with 2 weeks in advance. Nobody plans 6 months ahead, only if you’re flying abroad. 3 weeks ahead is already too much”. Therefore, if long-term planning is relevant for the Germans, they might have to figure it out the Indian holidays by themselves.

#### Power Distance (Hofstede, 2010)

Since Indians have a high-power distance scale, they expect more orders and less independency. If the German team wishes the Indians to speak truth to power and share more of their opinions, straightening their relationship and avoiding top-down orders might be helpful, for when Indians see a peer-to-peer relationship, they tend to discuss more:

My German Project Management is a true gentleman. Though he is our boss, he doesn't give us orders. He rather asks us if it's possible to do the task. It's a good kind of professionalism. I feel like sharing everything with him. (German team interviewee)

On the other hand, if the German team wishes to enter the system of vertically power oriented societies, Meyer's (2014, p. 138) suggestions would be, for example, communicating "with the personal at your level" and copying the manager if emailing "someone at a lower hierarchical level". In other words, for getting things done and being heard, having permission from one's manager to approach higher or lower levels employees would be helpful. A negative outcome of reinforcing top-down approaches might be increasing the feelings of fear at the Indian side, possibly leading them to lose trust on the German team and not at once speaking truth to power, nor taking independent decisions. As Indian interviewee said:

Indians fear what they will answer. Back in India and before having international experiences, I tended to hesitate when I didn't know the answer. (...) In India, we tend to think from the perspective of what others are thinking. Therefore, we tend to fear what they might think, we don't want to lose anything [like jobs, reputation, or even lose face,] if we say or do something in the wrong way. The management might correct us or demoralize us. In India, there is this fear of losing a job if you don't do it in the right way, so we tend to be a little bit hesitant, fearing doing something wrong in our work. The higher management might question me if I do something wrong. That why's 'no' means something else – we hesitate to say 'no' out of fear.

#### Individualism (Hofstede, 2010)

Since Indians have great concern for belonging to a group, they also tend to be concern with being misunderstood: The idea of 'what would people think of me?' As an Indian interviewee said, "It's better to speak individually than in group calls. Speaking in the middle of everyone feels like being juggled, somehow. Out of the fear of me being misunderstood, I prefer to talk to you one-on-one." An idea could be also considering one-on-one meetings when it involves relevant or sensitive subjects. Indians might feel more encouraged to open up when less people are around, therefore not fearing being rejected by the group due to possible misinterpretations.

#### Fear of Failure (Heinze et al, 2022)

Since Indians have a high fear of failure, that might lead to hiding technical issues or saying 'yes' even when they mean 'no'. As someone from the German team observed, "If they [Indians] have a problem, they will not be completely open. They say,

‘Everything is good, good, good,’ and at the last moment you realize there are some problems – then you have to do quality checks” (German team interviewee). Similar to the solution proposed for when working with high-context cultures, it might be helpful for the German team to start asking more open-ended questions, prompting the Indian team to speak their minds instead of agreeing with what was questioned. As suggested by a German interviewee: “Good: When can you do it? What are the plans? Bad: Are you able to do this?” Though they would still deal with a certain high level of fear of failure, open-ended question might push them to speak more, to truly speak their minds (Meyer, 2014, p. 51). Unlikely the case of closed-ended questions, statements are usually not induced on open-ended ones.

The respective points of improvement were based on the results of the interviews. They are not, however, a guarantee that teamwork would be improved. This paper mostly believes that expectations and their violations (Burgoon, 1995; 1976; 2015) must be the compass for any interaction between international teams, as well as the beforehand assumption of the hidden aspects of culture (Hall, 1976; Shaules, 2007). Then, and only then, individuals might praise flexibility and adapt to the unknown, relearning any possible social rule that a diverse culture might bring them, leading to success wherever they are in this big world. As an Indian interviewee mentioned, “After having international experiences, I learned to discern how people want to be answered. I like to find patterns of the likes they have, the patterns that they don’t have, and I try to follow that.”

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper has argued that culture goes beyond what is visible: “Beneath the clearly perceived, highly explicit surface culture, there lies a whole other world, which when understood will ultimately radically change our view of human nature” (Hall, 1976, p. 15). It goes beyond dress code, architecture, food, and dance (Shaules, 2007, p. 40). Since culture is a pattern of the mind (Hall, 1976, p. 166; Nisbett, 2003), when individuals with different patterns interact, depending on how different the patterns are, great or little misunderstandings may occur. Culture is also socially learned, passed from one generation to another, a process so-called homeostasis (Hofstede, 2010, p. 11). People are usually unaware of their own culture, only becoming conscious of it when interacting with cultures different than theirs (Hall, 1959, p. 69). Cultural taxonomies were developed

to facilitate intercultural interactions (Lewis, 1996). Regardless of the cultural model one chooses to use to understand diverse national groups, for any interplay with a foreign culture, it might be helpful if one beforehand acknowledges that every society has hidden values and beliefs, which is the concept of unconscious culture (Hall, 1976, p. 152), instead of assuming similarities (Barna, 1994, p. 337).

This thesis used a case of a multinational as a practical example to explain the different patterns of the mind. Interviews with the German and Indian teams were conducted to find out miscommunication spots, which were then explained considering cultural perspectives. Based on the cultural taxonomies of Erin Meyer (2014), Geert Hofstede (2010), and Richard Lewis (1996), identified in the employees' utterances, it was concluded that Germany and India are oppositely classified. Such differences led the teams of a multinational to have different perceptions and expectations of their ways of working. That mismatch of cultural expectations was affecting the teams' performance due to feelings of mistrust, lack of effectiveness, and motivation. Though one common truth cannot be established for two different perceptions of the world, like how Germans vs. Indians experience and understand the world, action steps were suggested in the light of the presented theories and the results of the interviews.

Doing one's best in an international workplace might mean adapting to different ways of working, as much as one needs. For there is a specific way of working, a particular behavioral language, and a distinct set of rules for each culture (Hall; 1959, p. 182). Becoming aware of the performance contrasts and likenesses among international team members may help "recognize the fault lines that may be dividing [them]" (Meyer, 2014, p. 249). If "invisible cultural barriers" affect multinational teams, it is likely that "each group is frustrated with the other's approach" (Meyer, 2014, p. 250). One good possible solution, is then, to exercise "cultural flexibility" and consciously avoid judgments, forcing as much as one can to "see the situation from an opposing perspective" (Meyer, 201, p. 150). As Meyer (2014, p. 252) stated, it is essential for twenty-first-century leaders to learn to distinguish "what aspects of an interaction (...) are a result of differences in cultural perspective." Regarding dealing with expectations and cultural differences, as well as adapting to them, an Indian interviewee used the following metaphor:

Let them do what they want, I do my best work – that's the best way to survive. You should accept people the way they are, that's how you survive. I can taste your food, but you cannot force me to love your food. I respect all kinds of food

habits. Their food habits are different, but it doesn't mean they are bad. Food is good everywhere, taste is different.

Leonardo da Vinci once said that “learning never exhausts the mind” (TED-Ed, 2015). Connecting his thought to intercultural communication, it might be that learning others' way of understanding the world will never exhaust one's mind. That is, learning others' cultures, or at least being open to learning, will never exhaust one's mind. But blankly assuming that one's own culture is the correct and only way to perform at the workplace, being unwilling to learn different perspectives, might indeed exhaust one's mind due to the miscommunications repeating themselves out of hesitance for acquiring such new points of view. Since globalization “transforms the way [people] work,” one needs the “ability to decode cultural differences (...) to work effectively with clients, suppliers, and colleagues from around the world” (Meyer, 2014, p. 253). A second likely wisdom is sung by Pocahontas, in the Disney animation movie from 1995. As the character John Smith comes to her land, trying to impose his ways, his mentality, and his beliefs on her people, Pocahontas' response is (Kuhn, 1995):

You think the only people who are people  
Are the people who look and think like you  
But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger  
You'll learn things you never knew, you never knew.

Though someone is unaware of their cultural invisible tendency to see the world (Hall, 1959), if they are attentive to when their expectations are violated at any given intercultural interaction (Burgoon 1995; 1976; 2015), maybe then they will be able to notice the invisible cultural barriers and adapt to them. If people are flexible to adapt to the many and various intercultural contexts, regardless of where they are in the world, and regardless of knowing about the different cultural taxonomies, they might be successful. As an Indian interviewee stated, “Food is good everywhere, taste is different.”

## Appendix I. Interview Questionnaire

The following countries were considered for this interview sessions: Team Germany; Team India; and Team Romania.

### Part 1 - Get to Know

1. In which country were you born and raised?
2. How many cultures do you consider having? (e.g., mum is Indian, dad is Chinese)
3. How does your international experiences look like? Have you ever lived abroad?

### Part 2 – Intercultural Knowledge<sup>3</sup>

4. What would you say it's challenging, when working with another culture?
5. How has it been for you, working in the same project with colleagues from India?
6. How has it been for you, working in the same project with colleagues from Romania?
7. Expected behaviors: what do you usually do when...
  - a. You disagree with your work colleague?
  - b. You disagree with your manager?
  - c. You cannot fulfil a deadline?
  - d. You feel like having too many tasks?
  - e. You don't understand the task? How would you ask for clarification?

### Part 3 – Intercultural Work

8. According to our anonymous feedback results, the local people are often frustrated when working with offshore teams. What's your view on that? What do you think it could be a solution for lessening such frustration?
9. Because I'm trying to find out different behaviors originated from different cultures, please answer the following questions with a single Yes/No.
  - a. Have you ever faced a situation where colleagues from Germany/India didn't show up in a meeting without notice in advance? Any idea of why this happens?
  - b. Do you consider that German/Indian colleagues communicate proactively (by proactively I mean thinking about next steps, future tasks possible risks and how to mitigate those risks)?
  - c. Have you ever faced the situation when you explained a task to German/Indian colleagues, and you have the impression your counterpart is not understanding the task? Why do you think that happens?
  - d. Do you feel you can count on your international team every time you need them? Why?
  - e. Do the colleagues from Germany/India usually tell you when they have days off?
  - f. Did you ever feel like needing time to teach your international colleagues?

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<sup>3</sup> Compare the different answers from different cultures: they can be indicators of different world perspectives.

- g. Do you sometimes struggle to understand what the German/Indian colleagues are trying to tell you? Why do you think that happens?
- 10. What is challenging to deal with from Germany/India?
- 11. What do you think we could do to improve in Germany/India?
- 12. What do you think your team can do to improve to avoid miscommunication with other non-local teams?

## Appendix II. Interview Results Classified<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Cultural Taxonomy: Meyer's (2014) Scheduling (Linear Time vs. Flexible Time)

**Coding Rules:** Germany = Linear Time

**Definition:** Projects follow an organizational chain, and 'one thing at a time' is the priority. Fulfilling deadlines, following the schedule, and good organization are prized (Meyer, 2014, p. 227).

#### Response of the Interviewees:

- Germans are very on time. They are also very concentrated about lunchtime. If it's 12:00-12:30, and we have meetings ongoing, they just stop to have lunch. But we can have lunch at 14:00 or later. They are very punctual about their time. They cannot vary their time: lunchtime, local time, working time. At 17:00, when the office hours are over, they simply go home. It can happen that in India we tend to stay working until later.
- Life is very sorted out in Germany. People are very punctual.
- In Germany, the deadlines are not flexible.
- Germans work fewer hours, but they are more effective in how they use their time. They are focused on working time. They start work at 07:30 and finish at 17:00. Indians start at 09:00, take breaks in between and end up working until late at night.
- In Europe they are slower. Work-life balance is very good.
- I don't like when people come to meetings 10 or 15 minutes late – I'm German, Germans are usually on time. If being late happens a lot, then I make a joke: 'Only the trains are usually late in Germany.'
- If I feel like having too many tasks, I prioritize them according to the demand, whether they came from the manager, the client, or the situation.
- In Germany, you report all working time, very well detailed and precise. In India, sometimes I have the impression they don't work for two, three days. I have the

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<sup>4</sup> Interviewees 01-13 are from the Indian team; 14-23 are from the German team.



impression they are doing nothing. The test is over, they are supposed to do something. That's not the way: in Germany, you have to report very detailed. It's always very transparent how many hours you spent for the company every day. That's very sensitive here in Germany. We wonder how it is normal for them to be flexible with time - that's impossible in Germany. When an hour is not detailed reported I have a bad conscience about the time reporting [*Schlechtes Gewissen*]. For them being imprecise with time reporting is not cheating, for me, it's cheating.

- Staying late in the office for us, Germans, means someone is too slow. If I give an 8-hour task, I judge whether the person will manage to fulfill it in 8 hours, not 10 or 4. Get your work done in 8 hours, otherwise you're too slow. In India, staying later means you're a good worker. I would never get this idea that he is doing a good job, he is being too slow at work. Working over hours is not positive, it's more negative, even if people work on Saturdays.
- In Germany, every person is very on time. You are sure people are attending the meetings. The resource from India is very flexible, they work very late. Some of them work until 10-11 pm. But you don't see this flexibility from Germany. A local person would not do that. There is a lot of pressure in Indian guys, they work a lot. But in Germany, the law doesn't allow you to work more than 10 hours. In Germany, for weekend work to happen, you have to take the approval of the work council.

### **1. Cultural Taxonomy: Meyer's (2014) Scheduling (Linear Time vs. Flexible Time)**

**Coding Rules:** India = Flexible Time

**Definition:** Project action steps are random, not necessarily following a linear order. Multitasking is common; valuable skills are flexibility and adaptability (Meyer, 2014, p. 227).

#### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- Indians are proactive. We skip lunch to solve issues.
- In India it's okay to be late.
- That's the demand from the counterpart and that's it. Integration teams can handle the work with pressure, so they receive more work.
- Working parallel is common in India. Maybe the meeting is not for you, but you have to be there (it's again the feeling that you cannot say no). Then people tend to use their time while being in the meeting. Multitasking is common in India. It's not common in Germany, but that's very common in India.

- It's normal that people get 3 projects at a time. There are times when people even work at weekends. I did not know how to set my priorities - everything is important. Then my manager told me, "Your first priority is your first project, when something else comes, then work on the other projects." Indians manage to do so much at the same time. Generally, people work 12 hours a day, and some people even work on weekends to get their projects done. Germans stop working from 09:00-17:00, and that's it.
- The team in India is fully committed and very flexible. It's no problem to ask them to work on the weekend. They don't mind working on the public holiday, if needed. Very seldom, when we ask them to work on a Saturday, or night shifts on Sundays, they don't mind. They are very committed to work.
- When we touch a topic for someone specific, they don't pay attention. I say, "Hello?", they say, "Sorry, what is the question?" The impression is they maybe are overwhelmed with work, and they are doing something else.
- We do parallel working. Automated tasks, for example, you can always do that in the background of a meeting. Something that needs your attention, whatever it could be done parallel, we do that, like copying files or automated scripts. I do my work parallel and listen to them, from time to time. That's normal for even other Indians. People repeat the same because they work in parallel. They won't say they were working in the background.

## **2. Cultural Taxonomy: Meyer's (2014) Communication (Low vs. High-Context)**

**Coding Rules:** Germany = Low-Context Communication

**Definition:** Communication is direct; the meaning lies in the words, not in the context nor between the lines. It is the idea of 'say what you mean and mean what you say' (Meyer, 2014, p. 39).

### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- Germans are very direct. I thought they were even rude. But that's their way of communication.
- Germans are more specific in what they say.
- My German Project Manager is always very straight to the point.
- Nobody is rude to the face in India. People will speak between the lines. In Germany, sometimes people are rude in the face. I doubt that is possible to explain to a German to read between the lines.

- People here [India] are more emotional – they tend to take the direct negative feedback personally, so they get offended. The more experiences you have, the more you get used to [Germans] being direct. People tend to think Germans are rude, but by understanding the culture you get used to it. Indians would never say to the Germans they are rude. The highest thing we can do is saying no, but we NEVER say it up front. Our culture is not of saying direct feedback on their faces [Germans].
- We [Germans] are very direct. We always have a goal in mind. It's a bit difficult because we don't see our behavior.
- We Germans are very direct, and Indians are totally the opposite.
- If they don't understand the task, the Indian do simulation, pretending they are working on something they didn't understand (coming back to the situation of saying yes when they mean no). If I don't understand something, I go to the same person who gave me the task to clarify it with them.
- As a German, I expect more directness from the other side.
- If we [Germans] say something, it's because we mean it. Germans are very direct, and people are not used to it. Germans don't do small talk.
- They [Indians] come with sentences as an answer. Sounds even as empty phrases. Cheap talk.
- I'm too much direct as a German.
- Germans are more direct. It kills people's motivation.
- About saying hi and asking before going straight to the point: We as Germans think that is definitely a waste of time. The German language doesn't afford figures of speech. If you have the time, I like to talk about the weather, about food... Chitchats. But "Hello, how are you?" before telling me what you need is sometimes very annoying. I know they [Indians] are very polite people: "Can I ask you a question?"
- When something is off, I try to talk to them [my Indian team] directly.
- I asked him [Indian] directly, "What's your opinion?" Then I got a silence. They don't answer, then I say, "Hello? Are you there?"
- Working with India is difficult. They tend to say, "Yes, no problem," but when you ask twice it is a problem. You have to discuss things more than once. They very seldom say no. Comparing it to the Germans, it's quite hard. We are too direct, structured. In Germany we say one sentence, but they [Indians] tend to speak a poem instead of one sentence for the same scenario.

- When we give them feedback, they listen to us. I'm very direct, so I make them listen to me. I call people by name, so it's hard for people to disappear. I give feedback in the meeting, not really one-on-one calls. I also give feedback in front of the customer. When they don't know in front of the customers, they come with empty promises and explanations.
- Germans are very clear about what they want, what they need. By clear I mean being direct and very precise.

## **2. Cultural Taxonomy: Meyer's (2014) Communication (Low vs. High-Context)**

### **Coding Rules: India = High-Context Communication**

**Definition:** Communication is indirect; the meaning lies between the lines. The listener and speaker should pay attention to the context; being direct means being rude (Meyer, 2014, p. 39).

### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- We don't use negative sentences. We don't say, "It's ugly," we say, "It's not that beautiful."
- In Germany, people are very direct. India is not like that - people communicate in a different way. India gives indirect 'no's and 'yes.' People NEVER say a clear and direct no in India.
- There are some reasons behind why we [Indians] cannot finish the task or not filling the deadline in time, so we tell them [Germans] all the reasons. We have clear reasons. Reasons means explanations. We have to make them understand what the possibilities and risks are there.
- Actually, we [Indians] are not much direct. We want to describe. We are not willing to be direct. We think it's a rude manner to be direct to say 'no.' Saying 'no' means rejecting the person.
- Germans are rude. We [Indians] are not rude. We try to manage them being rude, we try to convince them from our point of view. Convincing means giving reason and explanation, clarification.
- When I don't have too much confidence about my answer I say, "I'll check this and I let you know."
- If it's wrong, we say it in a polite manner. "I have different perceptions = no. It is not correct = no." This is the way of explaining something to the other guy. In India it's a bit rude to directly say no.

- A good answer means when words are indirect. “I’ll come back to you” is a soft ‘no.’
- The German would never understand when two Indians are talking on a funny way. Indians don’t really use sarcasm, don’t use irony as well. In India, humor comes from different scenarios: it comes on traffic. “You are from the city of traffic, Bangalore,” and that’s funny. It’s a soft humor, it’s light. The jokes on the local languages sound better. Indians are not comfortable doing jokes in English.
- Indians saying no is very rare. “We do it later” means ‘no.’ ‘Yes’ immediately means ‘yes.’ “I’ll do it later” means he is not interested to do it. Indians feel like no means being rude. If you ask the second time, he does it.
- We cannot tell the Indian to be direct, because it’s not in their DNA.
- Indians do not say, “I cannot do it.” Instead, they’re explain the reason behind they cannot do it. After all, they [who demanded a task] have to know the reason behind it. We don’t do it upfront – explaining our reasons gives clarity to the person [who demanded the task], it is polite, and it still focus on the relationship.
- Even if you are denying a task, you have to have a proper reason. We can’t deny straightway. If you deny it, it has to do be in the proper way, and in the proper way means using the words carefully.
- You have always to explain why you were late. I believe it’s what people expect – if you’re not able to make it, they expect an explanation from you. It’s good to give people explanations. If it’s a valid explanation, they accept (traffic is valid).
- I never heard a ‘no.’ Sometimes you question yourself if they [Indians] understood what you just said, because they don’t say ‘no.’
- When it comes to quality improvement, there are areas of communication to be improved. You tell the [Indian] guy, he says ‘yes,’ but that’s not the truth. You realize later that he has a problem. They are saying yes to things, and we discover that’s not real compliance from their side. I think they want to deliver, so they say ‘yes’ all the time. They say, “Yes, I’ll check.”
- If they [Indians] have a problem, they will not be completely open. They say, “Everything is good, good, good,” and at the last moment you realize there are some problems – then you have to do quality checks.
- Indians come with long stories as explanations, like, “My friend got injured and I have to bring him to the hospital.” Sometime the stories get weird.
- They say yes, but it does not come to pass (you see that he is doubtful). They always say yes, they don’t give clear, straightforward explanations. When I ask,

“When you think it will be ready?” instead of, “Will it be ready by this date?” I’m closer to reality.

### **3. Cultural Taxonomy:** Meyer’s (2014) Trusting (Task-Based vs. Relationship-Based)

**Coding Rules:** Germany = Task-Based

**Definition:** Trust comes from tasks’ success, consistency, and reliability. People tend to separate personal from professional. Trust is built based on business activities only, not on private hangouts to build relationships, like dinners and leisure time (Meyer, 2014, p. 171).

#### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- Germans are very professional. By professional I mean the way they handle things in the project. They don’t take issues to the personal level. The work roles and tasks are very well defined, and there are clear lines on what someone has to do. My Project Manager in Germany never asks me to work longer hours - he says, “If the job is done, it’s done. You don’t have to work more if you did what you had to do.” Germans are organized, planned, and time efficient. They don’t pressure you to work more.
- Germans are strict on the working hours. They are very confident about the work they do. They are perfect about it. They expect 100% at work.
- Initially I had trouble talking to people based in Germany. I had to get adjusted to their way of thinking. Some people are very straight to the point. In India, you first ask “How are you?”, talk about people’s life, and then you ask for something related to work. In Germany, they speak about work directly. For a person who never saw other cultures before, it might feel rude.
- We [Indians] tend to talk to people more. They [Germans] do not try to build relationships and connect. A 30-minute meeting is effective and straight to the point [not much space for "Hello, how are you doing?"]
- Our [Indian] culture is more about building relationships, instead of being practical and straight to the point. Germans say no and are rude, and the next moment they act as if something never happened. They separate issues. In India, if I don’t have a good relationship with you, then that’s always in my mind. We [Indians] cannot separate the relationship from work. It’s not the same way with them [Germans] – when something happens, they leave it behind and move forward. For me, when a relationship is lost, it is lost, and it is hard to have it back.

- They [Indians] never ask us if we can repeat if they don't understand (they are maybe shy). Seems like for them, asking too many questions is because you're failing. I ask because I want more information. They don't admit that they don't know. They don't want to show their weakness.
- They [Indians] do not have business pictures, they have private pictures: there are many traveling pictures. In our meetings they are now turning on their cameras. It's a private thing, so I don't ask them to turn the cameras on. I'm not forcing anybody, but I appreciate it when they do it.
- I do not feel like I know them [my Indian team], not at all. If you don't talk technically, they don't talk at all. They don't talk about private stuff.
- As long as they [Indian team] deliver, that's good enough.
- Germans separate professional from personal. If they [Indians] cannot do so, that's not my problem.

### **3. Cultural Taxonomy: Meyer's (2014) Trusting (Task-Based vs. Relationship-Based)**

**Coding Rules:** India = Relationship-Based

**Definition:** Trust is built not based on tasks, but on relationships. Sharing meals, having drinks, and spending time together are key factors for building relationships: "Cognitive and affective trust are woven together in business" (Meyer, 2014, p. 171).

#### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- Indians don't want to be rude by speaking directly. We, Indians, cannot say 'no' directly because we might be hurting or disrespecting someone. I cannot say a completely 'no.' It might feel rude to the other person.
- It's hard for Indians to separate work from emotions. It takes time to heal.
- Arguments are less in India. We [Indians] cannot argue in everything. It's better to avoid conflicts.
- Separating work and relationship – it's hard.
- Before starting or ending calls, we talk about festivals in India. These things also make us happier. It makes us feel more connected.
- In India, if something is not possible, you should always explain why - giving alternative choices is a mandatory and positive thing when saying no to something [avoiding]. Convincing and giving explanations is connected to giving someone respect. Also, creating a bond with someone means creating respect.
- I can't say no. Saying no in handling projects is not the right approach. If you don't know, you have to figure it out.

- You need to prove why you are disagreeing with someone. The other needs to understand the point. It's very good to understand why he disagrees. Proving means explanations and clarifications. If you're not giving explanations, then it will be a conflict. My point of view would be too simple, so I need to clarify. In a conflict of perspectives, someone needs to explain why a certain solution would be better, and then both parties come to the same solution.
- Our project manager from Germany is a gentleman. He knows what is there. He has trust on us. Certain project managers are not supportive and trustworthy like him. We are building a relationship since 2019. In India, managers have to understand the scope of what the employees are doing. Our German project manager is curious to understand our point of view.
- Connection comes through social media. That makes the team have a stronger feeling of relationship. Private life and professional life are acceptable to mix. India managers and Indian employees follow each other on Facebook and Instagram. We see the managers and they see us partying on social media (Facebook). Relationship is what matters in the professional life India.
- In India, having a good relationship is very important at work. The manager is important to your career – if the manager is not supportive, people tend to change jobs.
- Sometimes we don't want the same as others, but we need to adapt our preferences to theirs. We then rephrase our no in the answer.
- Indians are very emotional, even in the workplace. They don't separate their work and emotions. They fear that the other person feels offended. Relationships are very important in India.
- Indians would never say to the Germans they are rude. The highest thing we can do is saying no, but we NEVER say it up front. Our culture is not of saying direct feedback on their faces [Germans]. Preserving the relationship is better, so we do not confront them. A second factor for not confronting is the fear factor of not being well received by a manager [German or Indian], and that manager affects their job.
- We should not hurt others, even if they do something wrong.
- I think in India, people are shy to say no. I never saw them as rude. They are very polite, friendly, very flexible and adapting to situations very fast. They adjust and adapt to many situations. They bond to people very fast.



- Indians are more open than Germans. Personal bonding is more in other cultures than in Germany.
- They [Indians] have so much trust in me now that they feel they can correct me. I know some people from my team for 3 years. They are free to correct me, but these are the particular people who are working with me for a long time.
- I faced the situation when I explained a task to Indian colleagues, and it seemed my counterpart was not understanding it. You lose trust after postponing the tasks. I start second-guessing their skills. He says he can fix it quickly, but he didn't solve the problem. Because they do not tell me clearly what's going on, my trust is shaken.
- [Indians] don't have the feelings of relationships with us. They deliver with poor quality or deliver incompletely. They often don't take themselves accountable for their work. If you nail down your questions, you get the real answer. We start losing trust and respect for them.

#### **4. Cultural Taxonomy: Hofstede's (2010) Uncertainty Avoidance (High vs. Low)**

**Coding Rules:** Germany = High Uncertainty Avoidance

**Definition:** The unknown and risks are to be avoided through written or unwritten rules (laws, norms, religion). Uncertainty is seen as a threat, and it must be fought. People tend to "feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede, 2010, p. 191, 198).

#### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- I never faced a situation where Germans didn't show up in a meeting without notice in advance. That can happen with Indians, not with Germans. In India, if you're not able to attend the meeting, you explain it later. You drop a message before, and that's okay. It happens every time.
- We [Indians] don't think much about the tasks about to be done in the future, what will happen in the future. Germans do.
- German people are very disciplined.
- Germany is very structured. Germans want to get things done.
- When I cannot fulfil a deadline, I always let them know beforehand.
- An Indian guy from our team goes to church and he simply doesn't show up in our meetings. I would expect him to at least say that on Friday he would be off praying. They should inform us about the future. He didn't even say that he wouldn't show up, he just left.

- Here in Germany people are more comfortable with formalities. With formal, scheduled meetings, for example.
- Indian communication management is much weaker than European. The Line Manager from Italy would keep contacting me, updating me. From India that wouldn't happen – there are drastic changes that they don't always tell me about. They are less communicative. I wanted to assign a guy, but he already changed to another project – they don't give you heads up. They don't follow up. The resource changed the domain without discussion. They're not having a direct, open conversation.
- In India there's no planning beforehand – tomorrow is a public holiday, and the guy didn't know about it. My impression is that they do not like to ask for vacation, maybe that's something bad in India. It's very seldom planning for vacations [in India]. It's hard to believe their time planning. We have quick double-checks before the meetings – to check the holidays. They never talk about their holidays.
- We are trying to plan, so we look multiple weeks ahead. But out of a sudden, they [Indians] are offline: "I cannot work tomorrow," they say. I can count on them, but it's really a struggle to plan.
- Though they are unstructured, they are committed to work.

#### **4. Cultural Taxonomy: Hofstede's (2010) Uncertainty Avoidance (High vs. Low)**

**Coding Rules:** India = Low Uncertainty Avoidance

**Definition:** Low uncertainty avoidance means that people can deal well with the unknown, the unfamiliar risks. They tend not to "feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede, 2010, p. 191, 198).

#### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- A long vacation like that couldn't happen in India. If we are assigned to a project, it's our responsibility to get it done – we couldn't afford to take 4 weeks vacations. There would be the feeling of nobody will be doing something in the project. Also, the work pressure would be bigger after you're back 3 weeks off. It is a feeling like you're not working. We Indians give a lot of priority to our work. Vacations are only for times when there are not much work. Short leaves are therefore okay, 2-3 days.
- In India, people want to work for small assignments, but that's not the same in Germany (preference of 3 years in Germany equals a preference of 3 months in

India). Because the power distance is very high in India, there's a big difference between the salaries of engineers and managers – opportunities closer to the customers are better. The more experiences one has, the better it is for him to increase his job position. This hierarchical prospective might lead to Indians changing jobs quickly and getting preference for smaller projects – more projects mean more experience. When I worked as an engineer, my intention was never to stay with the big projects. People are keen to take many types of work.

- Indians have multiple tasks at the same time.
- Indian teams have much work. The Italy guys help us do some work, if the work can be done in parallel, between Italy and India. We usually have the feeling of being overwhelmed by work, specially between May-July. We receive tasks from other teams, not only from our main project.
- When someone asks us something, we usually answer, “I’ll try, I’ll do it,” so people tend to work more hours. India is not a developed country. The government does not support you if you lose the job. That creates fear. If you don’t have social security, you think then, “what will I do?” People have to support themselves. They can’t say no directly, they have to say yes. Then they [Indians] start being overwhelmed with work, overloaded than the normal working hours. People don’t have social security, so because of fear you have to work. It’s not by choice. You have to somehow deliver it. Then you end up doing more.
- The mindset of management in India is that you can’t take too many holidays because the work will be impacted. Dealing with international customers is generally very challenging in India. The projects would be impacted if you take too long vacations. We want to say no, but you can’t say no – I have to sacrifice my holidays to my project, to work. Therefore, vacations in India is seldom. I plan vacations for next week, not with one month beforehand. In India, you can do anything in the last moment.
- Changing jobs is very common in India. There are three factors influencing that: the working environment is very important (not feeling overwhelmed by work), the manager (how he looks at you, if you have space to grow), and the paycheck.
- We don’t have the concept of summer holidays, winter holidays. The major holiday is Diwali. Europe has holidays around the same time (school holidays, Christmas, etc.). In India, we have completely different holidays - what matters for the South might not matter for the North. There might be some confusions about holidays and plannings. Planning never happens 3-6 months ahead in India.

I plan with 2 weeks in advance. Nobody plans 6 months ahead, only if you're flying abroad. 3 weeks ahead is already too much.

- There's a lot of pressure in India working culture. There's a lot of competition.
- Germans are very strict about time. In India, it is more flexible. Due to environmental factors, we cannot be Germans – that is simply not possible. Traffic, for example, is very, very bad. We cannot even blame someone because he is not on time. Knowing this, people are then okay with being late to the office or meetings. If it's beyond control, then you are helpless. We cannot blame someone for something it's not about him, but the environment. Another environmental factor beyond our control is the weather – we have strong rains in India.
- Basically, in the morning, I plan the day ahead. I plan today and tomorrow. I never plan 3 or 6 months ahead. I plan what's in my control.
- Germans have a lot of holidays, so they take long vacations. Indians have a lot of festivals, so they take days off around these holidays.
- Indians tend to tell me one day before, "I'll take after tomorrow off. They do it randomly. They do not have that forward-thinking on the future."
- Though they [Indians] try thinking about the next steps, future tasks, possible risks, and how to mitigate those risks, they can't.
- They do not have this feeling of belonging: They are constantly changing jobs; they have nothing holding them back.

## **5. Cultural Taxonomy: Hofstede's (2010) Power Distance (High vs. Low)**

**Coding Rules:** Germany = Low Power Distance

**Definition:** Power is more horizontally distributed in society, with no big gap in salary ranges. "Subordinates and superiors consider each other existentially equal" (Hofstede, 2010, p. 74).

### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- When working for Germany, they have long vacations. They have vacations for 2-3 weeks. In India there's no such thing. We need approval for 2 days from project managers and managers. In India, if I take a 3 days leave, it's a big issue: you have to take so many approvals for that to happen. In Germany you can take 2-3 weeks and that's okay.

- My German Project Management is a true gentleman. Though he is our boss, he doesn't give us orders. He rather asks us if it's possible to do the task. It's a good kind of professionalism. I feel like sharing everything with him.
- If I assign one activity to you, I expect you to do it – you would not make it with others support. But in India, they assign the activity to the upper or lower level: “I'm a senior, I don't do it. That task should go to someone lower than me.” Here in Germany, our very expert guys also have to do simple things.
- I see how India and Europeans would cope with the situation differently. Indians stop and say, “What should I do now?” Guys from Europe say, “Why did it stop? What do I have to do to get the procedure working again?” The more they work with us, the more they learn to help themselves.
- When I disagree with a work colleague, I directly talk with them. But be careful the way you do it. You think of how you say it. With Indians I also speak to them directly. Involving the manager to a misunderstanding with a colleague sounds like escalation in Germany – involving people in cc sounds like unnecessary. I'm not adding the manager to solve my issues, I don't need my manager to do my mediator for me.
- When I cannot do something, like fulfill a deadline, I always communicate it clearly - always letting the manager know. I have a feeling they [Indians] are afraid of us. If they make mistakes, they don't talk about it. It seems like to them, it's better not to talk about the mistake rather than admitting it (as if there was a certain fear of making mistakes). I have the impression we have to strength our relationship so they [Indians] can trust us.
- When I disagree with a colleague I speak my mind freely – with Germany and India. We are equal and we should speak up.
- Indians don't take responsibility. They do what I say. Therefore, I take the responsibility for what I'm asking. There's too much asking, they seem to be too shy just to try something. They always want to hear from us, 'yes,' a confirmation. We need them to think, to use the brain, not to do what we say.
- As a German, I should not give too many orders to colleagues. Also, if you are new in a group, you should be shy and let the other talks.
- I'm never a top-down person. We are working as one team.
- In our project we have twice-a-week meetings where they [Indians] have space to speak up. As I said, I do not have a top-down approach, I'm not trying to bully by leading. I'm not a manager. I'm trying to lead by gathering together. I see them

as colleagues, not as engineers. I see them as equal. Usually we do decisions together, and I ask them for their opinions and proposals.

- Twice a week we have meetings where they [Indian team] have space to speak up. I do not have a top-down approach, I'm not trying to bully by leading. I'm not a manager. I'm trying to lead by gathering together. I see them as colleagues, not as engineers. I see them as equal. Usually we do decisions together, and I ask them for their opinions and proposals.
- They [my Indian team] call me out of the sudden, even though they already know the outcome. They want my confirmation for what they did. I have the feeling that I'm always checking and not progressing at all. Seems like they are insecure.

## **5. Cultural Taxonomy: Hofstede's (2010) Power Distance (High vs. Low)**

**Coding Rules:** India = High Power Distance

**Definition:** Power is more vertically distributed in society. It is unlikely that bottom-up approaches from subordinates to superiors happen. Salary differences are large, and "subordinates expect to be told what to do" (Hofstede, 2010, p. 61, 74).

### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- Direct feedback doesn't exist to managers. They give feedback to us, but not us to them.
- We [Indians] generally don't say 'no.' If they [people from India] say 'no,' someone from an European team would inform their Line Manager and that would affect their jobs. Maybe they are worried about their jobs.
- Seniors are listened more than the juniors in India. It's hard to speak to senior positions – speak truth to power is difficult. I believe it comes from the caste system. That's it, we need to work with that.
- If you are a junior, you're always under a senior. They are like mentors to you. They should make a task easier.
- In India, when you disagree with your manager you cannot be open. Not at all. There's usually this feeling of being afraid of managers. Germans [seniors, managers] understand more, they say, "We'll give you some guidance." It's easier to deal with Germans than with Indians, regarding the seniors.
- In India, if something happens, the manager should deal with the issue. The responsibility lies on the managers, not on the employees.

- In India, addressing the manager is Sir or Madam – that’s a sign of respect. There’s no such thing at our company – even in India you have to address the manager by their first name.
- When it comes to repeating the questions, Indians just want to make sure they understood the sentence clearly. It’s not always being distracted, nor working in parallel. Generally, Indians also ask more. They ask for clarification to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings. To do something right, you ask and clarify it - that’s why we ask.
- All people are not equal.
- If you’re not able to understand what you have been asked to do, it’s always right to ask more times to be in a crystal-clear manner. There’s no problem in asking if you’re not able to understand.
- If you are unable to understand, you have all the rights to ask. No manager, no colleagues, refuse to explain you something. Clear instructions and clear guidelines are very important in India. There’s no such thing as ‘doing your own way.’ If you have your ‘own way,’ you have to get approval from the management, not the colleagues. The colleagues are the ones who you discuss things, the managers are the ones who approve things.
- Indians tend to ask again if the question is not well-understood. Indians fear what they’ll answer. Back in India and before having international experiences, I tended to hesitate when I didn’t know the answer. Now I learned how people want to be answered. In India, we tend to think from the perspective of what others are thinking. Therefore, we tend to fear what they might think, we don’t want to lose anything [jobs, reputation, lose face] if we say or do something in the wrong way. The management might correct us or demoralize us. In India, there is this fear of losing a job if you don’t do it in the right way, so we tend to be a little bit hesitant, fearing doing something wrong in our work. The higher management might question me if I do something wrong. That why’s no means something else – we hesitate to say no out of fear.
- In society there’s an impression that only engineers, doctors, are worthy of respect. The other professions might not be good enough. You are bond to follow the successful people. It’s by following the rules that you’ll be successful. Risks are bad. You are whether successful or a failure. Stability comes from doing it correctly. There's indeed a fear of failing. Therefore, I ask about my tasks usually 2 times. It’s a way of ensuring what I have to do.

- In India, we say, "Hi, SIR," when talking to a manager. It's done through respect.
- Peer to peer feedback is less. It usually comes from your manager. I cannot talk to my manager in a certain way. Germans say whatever it is, but Indians look at it at the hierarchies. In India, nobody bypasses the hierarchies. If my manager says something, I follow because I don't want any trouble in the future. I don't want to break the relationship with my manager, so people tend to follow what their manager says. In India, feedback is always top down, never bottom up.
- India was for a long time a male dominated nation. The history of India is that men always wanted to be superior than women. Things are changing now; we are willing to overcome it. But there's [still in the present] a certain insecurity when they [Indian men] have a woman as a boss. We have that, I don't deny it.
- I have the impression Indians feel insecure when facing the whites because of a lack of exposure to their culture. They do not know the European culture, so there's a certain inferiority complex.
- We [Indians] are not saying no to the seniors, we have to be diplomatic.
- If someone speaks openly with their manager, they [managers] could understand in a wrong way. Managers might not understand us, so it's better not to speak. It's better to hide the problem.
- Some [Indian] guys have problem with women telling them what to do.
- I don't think Indian colleagues communicate proactively about possible risks and how to mitigate those risks. They are shy about it and you have to encourage them to talk about it. I think they see us as very high above them, position-wise.
- I also have the impression they [Indians] are scared of the customer. They are afraid of speaking their minds in front of the customer. Engineering and troubleshooting guys usually don't speak their minds. Maybe they don't feel comfortable, maybe they feel insecure. They need my approval to say something to the customers. They also don't ask the customers when they don't understand the task.
- There are some tasks that they [Indians] don't even want to do. For example, easy tasks are not done by high positions, they seem to think, "I'm too good for that."
- They don't like to receive orders or feedback from the outside. Someone with less power they don't listen to. I also have the impression they are scared of the customer. They are afraid of speaking their mind in front of the customer. Engineering and troubleshooting guys usually don't speak their minds. Maybe they don't feel comfortable. Maybe they feel insecure. They need my approval to



say something to the customers. They also don't ask the customers when they don't understand the task.

- Indians have a certain fear of failure. They have issues committing to something that they really didn't understand.
- [Indian] Women tend to speak less. I'm unsure about gender equality on their teams. The guys accept some girls, but not all of them.

#### **6. Cultural Taxonomy:** Hofstede's (2010) Individualism (Individualist vs. Collectivist)

**Coding Rules:** Germany = Individualist Society

**Definition:** People tend to be more individually oriented than group oriented; 'I' matters more than 'we;' and low-context communication is more used (Hofstede, 2010, p. 92, 106, 109, 113).

#### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- At the beginning, they [Indians] were questioning everything, "Are we allowed to do this?" They were so cautious that it made you feel frustrated about it. Slowly they became more independent. Direct confrontation made them more cautious. They are often cautious. Our company's philosophy is supposed to have independent work. I'm not supposed to work teaching them about things.
- When I disagree with a work colleague, I directly talk with them - but be careful the way you do it. You have to think of how you say it. With Indians, I also speak to them directly. Involving the manager in a misunderstanding with a colleague sounds like an escalation in Germany – also adding people in cc to an email seems unnecessary. I'm not adding the manager to solve my issues, I don't need my manager to do my mediator for me.
- When they say something, they say, "'We' have done something," not "'I' did something." Who on earth is 'we?'

#### **6. Cultural Taxonomy:** Hofstede's (2010) Individualism (Individualist vs. Collectivist)

**Coding Rules:** India = Collectivist Society

**Definition:** People tend to be more group-oriented than individually; 'we' matters more than 'I;' relationships are prized and directly confronting someone means being rude; high-context communication is more used; and since saying 'no' means being confrontative, other indirect ways of denying prevails, like, 'We will check it,' or 'We come back to you later' (Hofstede, 2010, p. 92, 106, 109).

#### **Response of the Interviewees:**

- We respect the Project Managers. We respect him [our Project Manager] as our manager – we cannot say no directly to him. It feels like disrespect saying no to our manager. We Indians feel like saying 'no' might be disrespectful to them.
- We have SharePoints and documents with solutions, internal to the Indian teams. We are one company. We work as one team. We try to give answers.
- We [Indians] are working as a team. At the end of the day, we have to finish our part, so saying we is more applicable. We every time we send a mail completion. There's no 'I,' because it's a team.
- When working as a team, it's always 'we.' The customer will never see you as 'I.' Our company is 'we,' it's a team, a big team. You're not presenting your individuality. It's good to say 'we.' We should avoid 'I,' it's a self-centered tone when 'we' is not used. I go with 'we' always. Even if I did something on my own, unconsciously someone might have helped me (like the info we get from the database). Sounds good when we say 'we,' 'I' doesn't sound well when you write a professional email. When we're working as a team, 'we' matters more than 'I.' We cannot operate single, never. It's always 'we' as a team.
- Share of information also happens between Indian teams. We have a common SharePoint for the Indian teams where it's listed, 'this is the issue, this is the solution.' Production design problems are on a SharePoint only for India, not shared with Germany.
- We get a lot of support from other Indians, when we don't know what do. When you do something, say we, not I. Anytime there's a team, there's a 'we.'
- We [Indians] don't talk much on bigger forums - we have the feeling of, "What if I say something wrong, and people take it wrongly?"
- 'We' is always preferred than 'I.' Even if you are working alone, you have to plan together.
- It's better to speak individually than in group calls. Speaking in the middle of everyone feels like being juggled, somehow. Out of the fear of me being misunderstood, I prefer to talk to you one-on-one.
- With Indians there are so many family dramas happening – weddings, moving homes, getting sick (sometimes I feel like the same person is getting married 3 times).
- Indians have bigger families.

### **Appendix III. Fear of Failure Statements**

- When it comes to not speaking up in meetings and repeating the questions - Indians just want to make sure they understood the sentence clearly, it's not always being distracted, nor working in parallel. Generally, Indians also ask more. They ask for clarification to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings. To do something right, you ask and clarify it - that's why we ask.
- Indians tend to ask again if the question is not well-understood. Indians fear what they'll answer. Back in India and before having international experiences, I tended to hesitate when I didn't know the answer. Now I learned how people want to be answered. In India, we tend to think from the perspective of what others are thinking. Therefore, we tend to fear what they might think, we don't want to lose anything [jobs, reputation, lose face] if we say or do something in the wrong way. The management might correct us or demoralize us. In India there is this fear of losing a job if you don't do it in the right way, so we tend to be a little bit hesitating, fearing doing something wrong in my work. The higher management might question me if I do something wrong. That why's no means something else – we hesitate to say no out of fear.
- In society there's an impression that only engineers, doctors, are worthy of respect. The other professions might not be good enough. You are bond to follow the successful people. It's by following the rules that you'll be successful. Risks are bad. You are whether successful or a failure. Stability comes from doing it correctly. There's indeed a fear of failing. Therefore, I ask about my tasks usually 2 times. It's a way of ensuring what I have to do.
- We [Indians] don't talk much on bigger forums - we have the feeling of, "What if I say something wrong, and people take it wrongly?"
- At the beginning, they [Indians] were questioning everything, "Are we allowed to do this?" They were so cautious that it made you feel frustrated about it. Slowly they became more independent. Direct confrontation made them more cautious. They are often cautious. Our company's philosophy is supposed to have independent work. I'm not supposed to work teaching them about things.
- When I cannot do something, like fulfill a deadline, I always communicate it clearly - always letting the manager know. I have a feeling they [Indians] are afraid of us. If they make mistakes, they don't talk about it. It seems like to them, it's better not to talk about the mistake rather than admitting it (as if there was a

certain fear of making mistakes). I have the impression we have to strength our relationship so they [Indians] can trust us.

- I also have the impression they are scared of the customer. They are afraid of speaking their mind in front of the customer. Engineering and troubleshooting guys usually don't speak their minds. Maybe they don't feel comfortable. Maybe they feel insecure. They need my approval to say something to the customers. They also don't ask the customers when they don't understand the task.
- They [Indians] never ask us if we can repeat if they don't understand (they are maybe shy). Seems like for them, asking too many questions is because you're failing. I ask because I want more information. They don't admit that they don't know. They don't want to show their weakness.
- Indians don't take responsibility. They do what I say. Therefore, I take the responsibility for what I'm asking. There's too much asking, they seem to be too shy just to try something. They always want to hear from us, "yes," a confirmation. We need them to think, to use the brain, not to do what we say.
- Indians have a certain fear of failure. They have issues committing to something that they really didn't understand.
- They [my Indian team] call me out of a sudden, even though they already know the outcome. They want my confirmation for what they did. I have the feeling that I'm always checking and not progressing at all. Seems like they are insecure.

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