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REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

A study on cultural diversity and performance in teams

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ABSTRACT

Working in multicultural teams becomes essential nowadays for Multinational Corporations to face globalisation and the growing complexity of today's world. Individuals from different cultural backgrounds have to understand each other and work efficiently together to achieve good level of performance.

This research aims at realising the potential of multicultural teams in MNCs. The objectives of the study are to better understand the effects of cultural diversity, its benefits and drawbacks, and the necessary conditions to reach high level of performance. The role of previous international experiences among team members is also discussed.

The theoretical framework includes previous findings, theories and concepts on cultural dimensions and diversity in teams, characteristics of multicultural teams, international experiences, team performance and multicultural interactions.

This qualitative research has a deductive approach. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviewees, representing seven different nationalities, have all experienced at least one international team of several months in a MNC. Ten of the interviews were realised face-to-face.

The empirical results show that cultural diversity broadens the perspectives of the team with different points of view and high creativity. Misunderstanding and miscommunication are the major difficulties faced by international teams. To take advantage of the benefits of such teams, cultural differences have to be taken into consideration. A good level of interaction between the team members as well as good relationships is necessary to fully realise their potential.

KEYWORDS: Multicultural teams, cultural diversity, performance, international experiences

1. INTRODUCTION

Working in teams and groups is nowadays an essential component of multinational corporations. Much of the work is carried out by people working together in a team, task force, committee, or operating group. Companies frequently use groups because theory assumes that people working together as a group can accomplish more than individuals can on their own. Among the different kinds of groups, teams are especially popular. They have become ubiquitous part of all organisations. On the other hand, with the globalisation and the growing presence of multinational corporations, multicultural teams represent an increasing phenomenon that managers have to deal with carefully. Managers must remain cognizant of the differences that can result from diversity, particularly cultural diversity, within a team. (Griffin and Pustay, 2005: 441.)

Moreover, team dynamics determine the success of a team work. The way the team members interact and communicate with each other influences the potential of a team. Thus, the behavioral processes have to be understood and taken into account by international managers. The characteristics of the team such as its composition are also important to perform well. They have to be appropriate with the task assigned. Finally the experiences of the team members have to be taken into account, especially international experiences. All these elements have to be taken into consideration by managers as they affect the performance of teams.

1.1. Key concepts and topic area

The study focuses on the group level and particularly team level taking place in the MNCs. Groups and teams are a major feature of organizational life. Groups of people constitute the work organisation and its sub-units. Activities accomplished by organisations require at least some degree of coordination through the operation of groups and teamwork (Mullins 2004: 517). Even though the terms 'team' and 'group' are often used interchangeably, a **team** differs from a group as it represents a specific

group that assumes responsibility for its own work whereas a group concerns any persons working together (Griffin & Pustay 2005: 442). According to Holland, Gaston and Gomes (2000: 232), a team is a collection of individuals who are independent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems (for example, business unit or corporation) and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries. An understanding of the nature and composition of teams is vital if the manager is to influence the behaviour of people in the work situation. The thesis focuses on **multicultural team** that can be defined as a group of people who work interdependently towards a common goal and who come from different nationalities (Davison & Ward 1999: 11). This type of group is named in many different ways such as heterogeneous Vs homogeneous team. Homogeneous teams are known in the literature to have better advantages, such as less conflict and better communication. Heterogeneous teams may have drawbacks such as less uniform norms. However, they have more creativity (Griffin & Pustay 2005: 441-43).

The **dynamics** of multicultural teams have to be studied to understand the benefits of these teams. Cultural diversity affects the teamwork process and its performance. therefore the roles of cultural diversity has to be understood. **Team effectiveness and performance** is also a central issue for many research on the topic. There are conditions and factors that enable to reach a good level of effectiveness and performance. The nature of the task to be performed is one of them. It is a significant factor that managers need to assess and match with the composition of the team. the task will be more accurate for a certain team according to its level of complexity and ambiguity. Some particular tasks may better fit to homogeneous teams like routine ones for example. Personality traits, values, attitudes and perceptions across cultures also play a role in team dynamics. Cultural dimensions of team members must also fit with the nature of the task to complete. (Griffin & Pustay 2005: 441,442.)

The integration of the team members is an important element which determines the efficiency and success of multicultural teams. Moreover, the interactions that represent the mutual actions of individuals in the team also matter. The level and quality of

interactions between team members is also a factor influencing the integration and the overall efficiency of the team. (Gahmberg & Routamaa, 1999.)

The role of previous **expatriation experience** among team members has to be analysed. An expatriate experience is an international assignment that has occurred previously in the carrier of a group member. Expatriation experience is known for developing global skills and cultural sensitivity which is required for the success of multicultural teams. Moreover, the probability of a strong relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and previous expatriate experience is presented by Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall. Usually, culture novelty has a negative impact on interactions for managers working in a new cultural environment. Consequently, members who have acquired the ability to cope with cross-cultural adjustment during their previous expatriate experiences are more likely to be efficient international team builders. Therefore, the use of successful international assignments may be valuable and promising for cross-border teams working in a MNC.

The main fields concerning the topic of this study are international management, cross-cultural management, global management, human resource management and organizational behaviour and planning. This research is particularly based on the previous research *the impact of national cultures on cross-cultural teamwork* conducted by Henrik Gahmberg and Vilma-Lotta Routamaa (1999) at the University of Vaasa.

1.2. Research gap

Most of the researches have focused on the negative aspect of cross-cultural teams. A long list of negative aspects of cross-cultural settings is present in the literature. Cultural diversity is rarely considered as beneficial to organisations and is rather seen as the source of difficulties. Managers and persons working internationally have difficulties to identify and express the benefits to be gained from cultural diversity compared to the problems it causes. Thus, this study aims at highlighting the advantages taken of multicultural group works. The positive character of cross-cultural teams is therefore

emphasized in this research as well as the beneficial role of cultural diversity, even though its negative effects are also taken into account. (Adler, 1997: 98, 99,153.)

The use of former expatriates in multicultural teams is a topic that has not been much studied. Research carried on expatriation mainly focus on human resource issues such as selection and pre-departure preparation, global career path and repatriation, but also on the role of expatriation in transferring knowledge between headquarters and subsidiaries. The link between cross-cultural teams and expatriation is a quite new research approach. Moreover the possible positive effect of expatriate experience among team members on the team effectiveness has not been examined, neither if previous expatriates are more likely to be useful and efficient as team member.

1.3. Research problem

The success of a cross-cultural team working on an international project depends mainly on the efficiency of the persons involved in it, in working together. When members do not share the same culture, they have different working styles and habits. These differences may lead to cultural misunderstanding as well as communication problems which prevent the cohesion of the group, the cooperation between members and finally the overall efficiency of the project. In addition, the team's role structure may not be well-defined and each member does not have a particular role to play on the team, the norms may be unclear and ambiguous and the identification of informal leaders within the team may become impossible. The diversity of multicultural teams is viewed as an obstacle to its overall efficiency. Indeed, a heterogeneous team often has more conflicts, poorer communication, more creativity, less uniform norms, lower level of cohesiveness and more ambiguous informal leadership (Griffin & Pustay 2005: 441-43). Homogeneity promotes integration and trust and facilitates communication. Those advantages frequently outweigh negative effects of narrowness or redundancy within the group and companies sometimes do not take the risk to have cultural diversity

within teams. Moreover, the nature of a group's task has a significant impact on the benefits and costs of cultural diversity in a group (Gahmberg & Routamaa 1999: 26).

In some particular situations the heterogeneity of the teams may be positive. The nature of the task to be performed and the composition of the team have to match with each other. A heterogeneous team may be more effective if the task is none-routine, complex, and ambiguous. The diversity of knowledge, backgrounds and experience of international team members can be then valuable (Griffin & Pustay, 2005: 441-43). Thus, it seems possible to take advantage of this diversity in some particular situations. Cross-cultural teams have a good potential in terms of effectiveness and productivity. Culturally diverse teams have a wider range of resources that enable them to work more productively. Cultural differences that are well managed become strength, a productive resource to the team. Cross-cultural teams are therefore more performing in creating more and better ideas, alternatives and solutions than homogeneous teams, due to the wider range of perspectives. Culturally diverse teams are more comfortable when dealing with inventive tasks rather than tasks requiring agreement (Gahmberg & Routamaa 1999: 27).

On the other hand, firms do not use often the competences acquired by expatriates during their international assignment. This has two negative effects; the expatriate is usually frustrated to not apply its global competences during repatriation and leaves the firm for another corporation. This is costly for the company losing the employee on whom it has invested for the international assignment. Expatriate experience is a scarce resource, therefore even a moderate amount of expatriate turnover can be costly to MNCs. Moreover, the firm also loses the opportunity to use the knowledge acquired during the expatriation. By failing to utilise the skills gained by expatriates, MNCs are depriving themselves of excellent resources to aid them in the globalisation process (Handler & Lane, 1994). The global firm must use its people who have completed international assignments, spreading them through the organisation. It must ensure that individuals coming back from overseas assignments are provided new jobs that use the knowledge and skills learned overseas and are given opportunities to share that learning. Valuable expatriate employees have to remain with the organisation long enough to

willingly share their experience (Briescoe & Schuler, 2005:84). Therefore, it may be possible to use those global skills gained by expatriates in the context of cross-cultural team works, thus increasing multicultural teamwork efficiency. Expatriate experience may also be more useful when dealing with certain types of group's task such as creative and none-routine ones.

1.4. Research questions

Based on the research problem, two main research questions can be identified:

- *What are the effects of cultural diversity in multicultural teams in terms of performance?*
- *What are the necessary conditions to reach high performance?*

The research question deals with the characteristics of the cross-cultural teams working efficiently on a project.

A sub-question can also be identified. This is a complementary question that addresses the need to deepen the analysis of the characteristics of a multicultural team working effectively. Indeed, global skills gained during previous international experiences seem to be promising when applied in the framework of international teams. Thus, the eventual positive impact of previous international experiences in multinational teams is studied.

- *What is the role of previous international experiences in multicultural teams?*

This sub-question implies to study the aid given by team members having an expatriate experience to manage, take positively and take advantage of cultural diversity in multicultural teams.

1.5. Interest of the topic

The research on group level is a relevant field of study as groups are increasingly used by companies. The main reason is that in theory, people working together as a group can accomplish more than they can working individually. The globalisation and complexity of today's business require a more team-oriented approach to succeed. Everyone involved in a long-term and international team project looks for the ideal team-mate (Griffin & Pustay 2005: 441-43). Moreover, the role of managing multicultural teams is essential for managerial success. Effective teamwork becomes even more important with the increasing number of global companies. Mullins has stressed the importance for managers to be aware of the impact of groups and teams and their effect on organizational performance (Mullins, 2004: 517-579). The ability to function effectively in teams is crucial for the implementation of a global strategy, required to face the increased complexity of global operations (Lane & DiStefano, 1992: 55, 56).

The study is particularly aimed at global managers dealing with multicultural teams for the implementation of a global strategy as well as project managers implementing an international team to work on a project. Any manager involved in a cross-cultural team and concerned about the dynamics existing within international teams and influencing the efficiency of the teamwork may be interested in this research.

1.6. Objectives of the study

The aim of the thesis is to better understand the multicultural team dynamics, existing in MNCs and influencing the efficiency of the team work on the project realization. The influence of the team characteristics on its performance, have to be analyzed. The characteristics taken into account are cultural diversity, level of international experience of its members and type of task. One of the objectives of this study is to find out the conditions where culturally diverse teams are more efficient and the diversity is perceived as an advantage. The benefits and drawbacks are explained and then the

conditions to reach and optimize these benefits are presented. Moreover, the role of members' experiences such as expatriate experience, as well as its effects on team effectiveness has to be identified precisely.

Team effectiveness is particularly measured by the level of interactions between team members and their integration within the group. Those two elements constitute preconditions to achieve the maximum level of performance in the team. Indeed, a high level of interaction between team members reflects a good level of communication which is a significant element of team performance. The integration of all members is also necessary as they need to have an active role in the team and to share and discuss their contributions with others. The final aim of the study is to highlight the positive aspect of multicultural teams and to understand how to take fully realize their potential. Finally, the possible existence of synergies within such teams is aimed to be found.

1.7. Limitations

The study includes cross cultural team working on a project in MNCs and therefore excludes SMEs. The team members represent at least two different nationalities and therefore minimum two cultures are involved. The expatriate experience among team members has to be successful and is measured by a period of one year minimum spent abroad. The international assignment has to be somehow recent, thus carried on at least within the last ten years. The team members may be sent as expatriate in the multicultural team to work on the project. However, this is taken separately. This element is taken into account but is not considered the same as a full expatriate experience of one year minimum. The international project for which the multicultural team is working is a setting element for the research. Thus, the study does not address the international project management issue. A priority is given to recent literature from the two previous decades.

1.8. Conceptual framework of the study

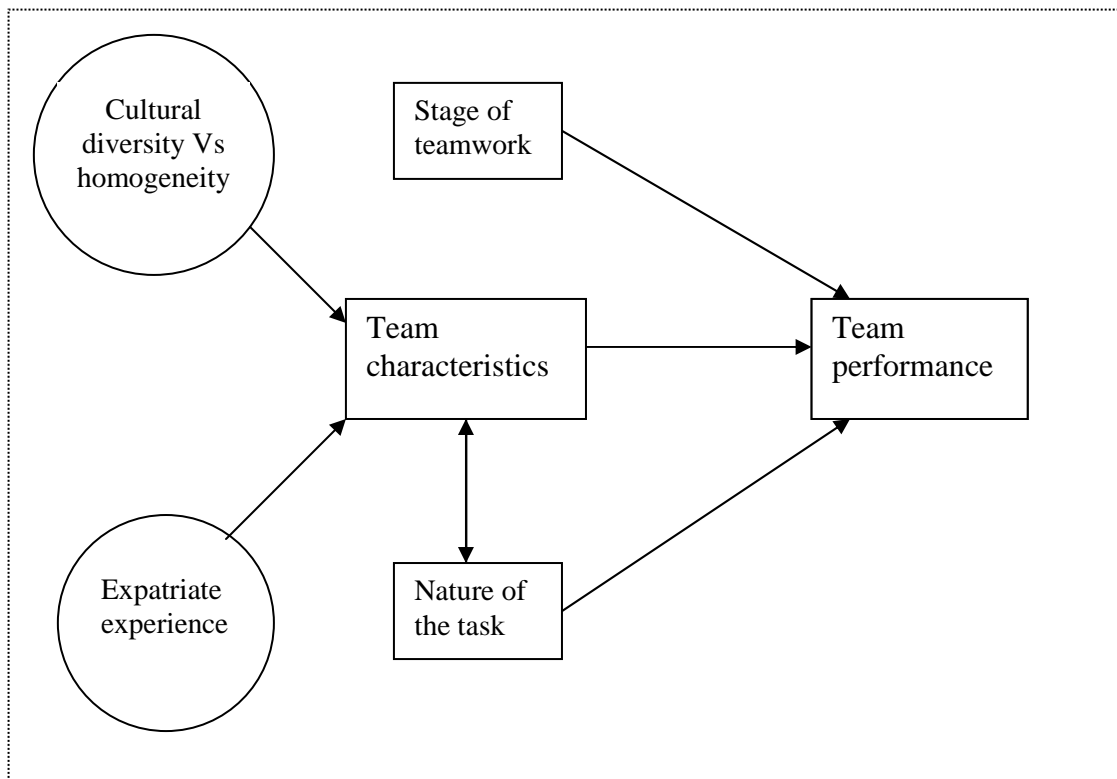


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

Cultural diversity (Vs homogeneity) and expatriate experience are important attributes that characterise international teams. They have a significant influence on a team performance. Certain characteristics of a group composition such as cultural heterogeneity are more appropriate when dealing with nonroutine, complex, creative specialised and ambiguous tasks, to achieve a good level of efficiency. Therefore a certain task has to be accomplished by a team which has the right characteristics. Thus, the level of multicultural team effectiveness varies according to the nature of the task it has been assigned. Its level of performance will also depend on the stage of the teamwork as some stages and processes are more appropriate to a culturally diverse teams.

1.9. Structure of the study

The first chapter introduces the topic and the area of the study. The key concepts are defined, the objectives are presented and the research problem is explained.

The second chapter analyzes more in depth the different elements of the topic. They are cultural dimensions and diversity in teams, characteristics of multicultural teams, international experiences, team performance and multicultural interactions. A framework of analysis is presented in the end.

The third chapter describes the methodology of the study. The research approach, the data collection process and background information of the respondents are explained in details. The way data are analysed is also presented. The chapter finally discusses the reliability and validity of the research.

The chapter four details the findings of the research. They are analysed, interpreted and presented in four different themes. Some citations are added to illustrate the explanations.

The last chapter presents the major results and concludes the study. The results emerge from the comparison and combination of previous research with the findings. The contribution of the study and its implications are presented. Finally, suggestions for further research are made.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study where the central concepts are analyzed in depth. The theoretical framework consisting of previous empirical research reviews the main concepts of cultural diversity, multicultural teams, expatriate experience, team performance and multicultural interactions. The relevant theories and models are then summed up in a table to develop the framework of analysis. The final conceptual framework of analysis is presented and discussed in the end of the chapter.

To introduce the theoretical framework, we can say that people have to work together to cope with the increasing complexity of local and international issues and respond to them intelligently. Problems and opportunities found, concern much larger geographic areas. Therefore, individuals from different nationalities need to constitute teamwork (Davison & Ward 1999: 11). Cross-cultural teams can better achieve specialized and complex tasks requiring an innovative and imaginative approach. They are mainly utilised by global firms and MNCs to face the competitive global environment to develop, organise and plan marketing and sales strategies, transfer technology, communicate between headquarters and subsidiaries in different countries and improve their human resource systems (Marsick, Turner & cederholm 1989: 46).

Multicultural teams have a good potential for complex and costly global strategies. They are suited best for achieving local responsiveness and organisational learning. They can also be used to shift dominance from headquarter national culture. These teams are finally utilised to coordinate laterally, which is an answer to the demands of complex global environment. There are three basic lateral organisation options that cross-cultural teams can accomplish; coordination across functions, coordination across business units and international coordination of activities across countries and regions. (Gahmberg & Routamaa 1999: 14.)

2.1. Cultural dimensions and diversity in teamwork

The effect of culture and diversity and its role in the teamwork process is presented in this part. Culture is explained by the perspective of cultural dimensions. The influence of culture on people's behaviour is also introduced. Then the advantages and disadvantages of diversity are discussed.

2.1.1. Cultural dimensions

In order to understand the role played by cultural diversity on teamwork, the concept of culture has to be defined. Culture has been explained in many ways by different authors as more than 160 definitions exist (Gahmberg & Routamaa 1999: 7). In this study, culture is considered as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another. It also represents the mental programming of people in a certain environment, which is always unique and differs from other cultures' programming (Hofstede 1997: 2-7). Culture consists of shared, commonly held body of beliefs and values that are taught to people so early in life that they are usually unaware of their influence (Lane, Distefano & Maznevski 2000: 28). Culture is a way a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas. It also represents a way of life due to a learned behaviour, which is then handed down to the next generation through the means of communication (Lopez 2005: 18). There are different levels of culture. They are national, corporate and occupational cultures. Teams are concerned with all these aspects (Gahmberg & Routamaa 1999: 7). However, the study focuses only on the national level of culture.

Considering the national level of culture, the cultural aspect is not uniformly manifested in a country. People are not going to have the same reactions but rather patterns of reactions, which will be more often present in a society than in others (Lane et al. 2000: 28). Indeed, the concept of national culture is not a combination of the properties of the average citizen. It is rather a set of likely reactions of citizens with a common mental programming (Hofstede 1997: 112).

According to Hofstede, the differences of attitude in the workplace exist across a wide range of cultures and can be summarized in four primary **cultural dimensions**: individualism / collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity / femininity. They reflect the way managers and employees vary between each other. A fifth dimension has been found later: long term/short term orientation (Confucian dynamism), however it mostly concerns Asian countries. His research represents the most complete study on the topic as it was conducted in 60 countries, including the main parts of the world. Moreover, 160 000 managers and employees working for an MNC were surveyed twice. (Hofstede 1984, 1991: 4-10; Adler 1997: 46-47.)

Individualism is the fact that people see themselves as separate individuals. They belong to a loose social network where they are responsible for only themselves and their immediate families. In collectivism, people consider themselves a part of a group which is a tight social network and take care of the whole group. (Hofstede 1984, 1991.)

Power distance is characterized by the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations accept an unequal distribution of power. In high power distance, managers and subordinates see each other as very unequal whereas in low power distance, the effect of hierarchy is much less visible. (Hofstede 1984, 1991.)

Uncertainty avoidance measures the degree in which people in a society feel threatened by ambiguity and therefore try to avoid uncertain and ambiguous situations. Uncertainty avoidance is characterised for example by the need for formal and written rules, providing greater career stability and feeling stress. (Hofstede 1984, 1991.)

Masculinity measures the existence of masculine values in the society such as career success, money, acquisition of things (materialism) and assertiveness. However, femininity emphasizes the values such as quality of life, relationships among people, and concern for others. (Hofstede 1984, 1991.)

Long-term / short-term orientation or Confucian Dynamism is a dimension related to the Asian culture and traditional Confucian values. It measures the employee's loyalty to the work ethic and their respect for tradition. It can be described as virtue versus truth. The American culture is for example short term oriented while the Chinese one is long-term oriented. (Hofstede 1984, 1991.)

A framework of seven cultural dimensions was developed, taking more into account the fields of sociology and anthropology. **Universalism Vs Particularism** describes the belief that there is one truth and a set of values and rules that has to be accepted and adopted everywhere. Exceptions are avoided because they weaken the rules. Particularism is seen in societies where people make differences for their relationships and to protect their families and friends whatever the rule. **Collectivism Vs Individualism** corresponds almost to the same dimension as Hofstede's. **Affective Vs Neutral relationships** correspond to the way people express their emotions to others. It concerns the communication in the society. In affective relationships, thoughts and feelings are revealed openly to others while in neutral relationships, people are not used to do so and this is neither an accepted nor an ideal behaviour in the society. **Specificity Vs Diffuseness** measures the fact that each area of life is considered differently, as a specific case. Managers that are specific-oriented differentiate the situation where they meet their subordinates and behave according to it. People are more direct, to the point, blunt, purposeful and precise. In diffuse cultures, managers keep their status and power whatever the context and persons are rather indirect, circuitous, evasive and tactful. **Achievement Vs Ascription** differentiates the way employees are promoted in an organisation and particularly the criteria explaining the acquisition of a status. In achievement-oriented cultures, status are accorded according to their achievement, meaning their efficiency and knowledge, whereas in ascription-oriented cultures, persons are given status based on their age, gender as well as their commitment to the organisation, measured by the respect showed for superiors. **Time orientation** measures the orientation a person has to past, present or future. It also consists of the way activities are accomplished. They can be organised sequentially or synchronically. **Internal Vs External Control** corresponds to the belief that organisations can be controlled as machine (inner-directed culture) while in outer-directed cultures,

organisations represent a product of nature and their well functioning is based on the environment and a favourable natural balance. (Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 9-10.)

Other cultural dimensions are used to explain cultural differences. One of these frameworks includes five dimensions. They are Time, Space, Things, Friendships and Agreements. Six other cultural orientations have been identified. They are relation to nature, relationships among people, mode of human activity, belief about basic human nature, orientation to time and use of space. The dimensions of relation to nature, mode of human activity, belief about basic human nature and use of space are quite different from the others seen above. Three different relations to nature exist; subjugation, harmony and mastery. The modes of human activity are divided by being, thinking and doing. The different beliefs about human nature are evil, neutral or mixed and good. Finally, the use of space can be private, mixed and public. (Lane et al. 2000:26-48.)

Those cultural dimensions are important to take into consideration when implementing a teamwork that involves different cultures. The cultural dimensions influence team members' behaviour and explain the dynamics of the different world views. Those differences are named and categorized to better analyse and consider them. Indeed, people whom cultural differences vary do not share the same vision of the world. They will have different perceptions of the same situation. That is the reasons why the dimensions are crucial to manage culture differences. (Lane et al. 2000:20-24.)

On the other hand, cultures differ, that is why they are expected to influence the behaviour of individuals. Moreover, culture affects personality which in turns affects behaviour. Indeed, between 25 and 50 per cent of the personality of an individual is explained by culture (Lopez 2005: 21). Not all the attitudes and behaviour of an individual can be explained by culture. This is difficult to distinguish what is related to the particular personality of an individual and what comes from his culture. Values that are created by culture, affect attitudes of an individual about the form of behaviour considered most appropriate for the present situation. The interaction of values, attitudes and behaviours represents the cultural orientation of a society. The process from culture

to behaviour constitutes an interrelated and continuous cycle where elements influence each other (Adler 1986: 9).

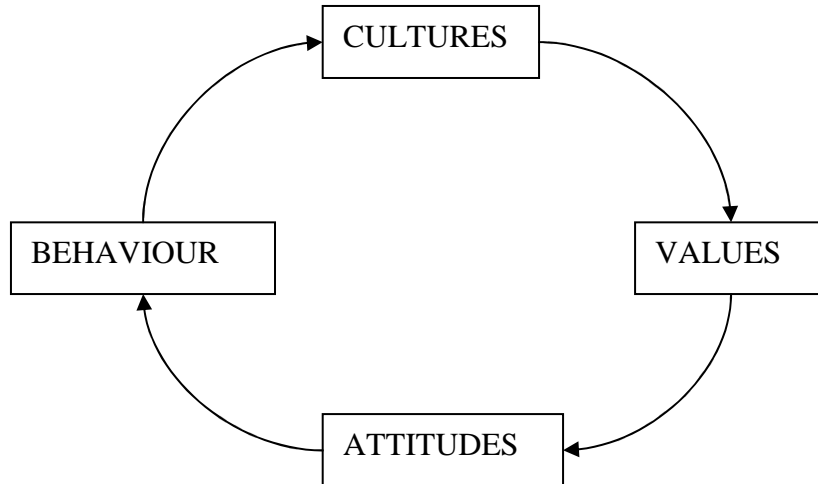


Figure 2. The influence of culture on behaviour (Adler 1986: 9).

The differences of individual behaviour across culture can be related to personality, attitude, assumption and perception. Some other aspects such as stress can also vary across cultures. Five different **personality traits** have been found to be particularly relevant to organisations, among thousands that have been identified. They are called the “big five” personality traits. Agreeableness constitutes the ability of a person to get along with others and keep a good-natured relationship with others. Conscientiousness measures whether a person is organized, systematic, self-disciplined and responsible. Emotional stability refers to people who are poised, calm, resilient and secure. Extroversion represents the extent to which an individual feels at ease in his relationships with others. Extrovert people are sociable, talkative and assertive. Finally, openness refers to the flexibility a person has towards new ideas and his willingness to change his own beliefs and attitudes as a result of new information. Other important personality traits that influence the behaviour in organisations are locus of control, self-efficacy, authoritarianism and self-esteem. On the other hand, differences in attitudes across cultures are particularly seen in job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Concerning perceptions, they are unique for each individual as they constitute the processes by which individuals get a stimulation or information from the environment

and interpret it. Therefore, two persons can have an entirely different view of the same situation, due to differences of perceptions. The cultural backgrounds of individuals affect their perceptions, as well as their assumptions on what they should do or should not and what is good or bad. (Griffin & Pustay, 2005: 424-429.)

The necessity to understand and accept cultural differences to manage cultural diversity within teams has been emphasized in the literature by the authors Lane et al. (2000) and Lane & Distefano (1992). Indeed, cultures of individuals are extremely difficult to change because they exist deep in the minds of people (Lopez 2005: 21). Consequently, cultural differences have to be accepted when working in a team.

2.1.2. Diversity in teamwork

Concerning diversity in teamwork, Adler (1997: 101) has identified some culturally synergistic advantages as presented in table 1. When it comes to divergent processes, diversity leads to the most potential advantages. It is most beneficial when the company wants to expand its range of ideas, perspectives, product lines, or its marketing plans. Diversity is also a solution to promote creation. Indeed, it becomes an advantage in attempting to reposition the organization, launch a new project, create a new idea or a marketing plan, implement a new operation, or assess emerging trends from a new perspective. Multiculturalism enables the organisation to be more flexible and open to new ideas. Diversity also enables the company to better understand customer's needs. On the other hand, having multiple perspectives creates advantages to problem solving and a greater possibility to avoid groupthink. Groupthink is defined as a mode of thinking where people attempt to align their thoughts to the ones of the other members of the group, the way of thinking is homogenised within the group and differences of point of view decrease. It results in a lower efficiency. The advantages are mostly seen in complex problems involving many qualitative factors and culturally distinct client groups. Cultural diversity has to be used as resource rather than treating it as a liability to the organisation to realize the potential advantages.

Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Diversity (Adler 1997: 100).

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p align="center">Culturally Synergistic Advantages: Organisational Benefits Derived from Multiculturalism</p>	<p align="center">Disadvantages due to Cultural Diversity: Organisational Costs due to Multiculturalism</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding meanings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple perspectives Greater openness to new ideas Multiple interpretations Expanding alternatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing creativity Increasing flexibility Increasing problem-solving skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity increases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambiguity Complexity Confusion Difficulty converging meanings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Miscommunication Hard to reach agreement Difficulty converging actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard to agree on specific actions
<p align="center">Culture-Specific Advantages: Benefits in Working with a Particular Country or Culture</p>	<p align="center">Culture-Specific Disadvantages: Costs in Working with a Particular Country or Culture</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better understanding of local employees Ability to work more effectively with particular local clients Ability to market more efficiently to specific local customers Increased understanding of political, social, legal, economic and cultural environment of specific countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overgeneralising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational policies Organisational strategies Organisational practices Organisational procedures Ethnocentrism

Research made on cultural diversity and multicultural teams have mostly pointed out the disadvantages of cultural diversity in professional environment. As shown in table 1, Diversity leads to troubles that hinder the effectiveness. These problems are more often encountered in certain situations. Adler identifies four different situations where diversity causes problems. First, problems most frequently occur when convergence is needed. People need to think and act in a similar way to perform well and persons from different cultural backgrounds have different attitudes and ways of thinking. In convergent processes, where homogeneous ways of thinking and acting are needed and there is a higher potential for ambiguity, complexity and confusion. Second, difficulties are faced when a single arrangement has to be found, concerning formal and even informal agreements. Decision-making are problematic when culturally different points of view are involved. Third, problems also occur when organisational practices and

processes are overgeneralized. A specific adaptation to the local market is sometimes needed and the risk is to implement a too general strategy. Fourth, the development of overall procedures becomes difficult as cultural diversity increases complexity. (Adler 1997: 98-100.)

In addition to cultural dimensions and the aspect of diversity, the characteristics of the team and its team members are also an important factor to consider.

2.2. Team characteristics

The success of a teamwork involved in a common project depends a lot on the composition of the team. It also has to be managed differently according to its characteristics. Two aspects of the work in teams will be particularly stressed: multicultural teams and international experience among team members. A cross-cultural team is more challenging to manage than a national team and requires paying attention to some elements such as cultural differences, values and practices that will determine its future success. More likely a greater period of time will have to be spent for such teams to get to know each other, to set common rules and practices that are acceptable to everybody than in national teams. On the other hand, the experience of team members, particularly international exposure and expatriation has also a role to play in the success of teamwork. A first part discusses the characteristics of culturally diverse teams and a second presents the role of international experience.

2.2.1. Multicultural teams

Groups form the basic structure of organisations (Adler 1986: 102) and teams are a dynamic form of groups. To understand the dynamics of multicultural teams, the concept of team has to be defined. According to Holland et al. (2000), a team is a group of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see and who are seen by others as a social entity embedded in one or

more larger social systems, and who manage their relationships across organisational boundaries. Team members need to work with each other to succeed.

A multicultural team represents a working group that consists of members from different cultural backgrounds, whose activities cover several countries. It is also defined as a group of people who come from different nationalities and work interdependently towards a common goal (Davison & Ward 1999: 11). Many different terms are used for such teams. They are cross-cultural, international, multinational, multicultural, global, transnational, culturally diverse, cross-border, heterogeneous etc. (Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 6). There are some slight differences between those terms but they are going to be used interchangeably in this study.

The need for teamwork has been increasingly important for managerial success. To deal with the complexity of global operations, the ability to work in teams and particularly culturally diverse ones becomes even more important. A research conducted on the experience of thirty major MNCs in creating teams to speed up their global interests, showed that teams are used differently nowadays and especially in more participative and powerful ways. Cross-cultural teams are more often necessary and they are used to carry on diverse functions. Teamwork ability is particularly critical for the implementation of a global strategy. (Lane & Distefano 1992: 56.)

Multicultural teams are generally characterised by newness as members of multicultural teams have to work in a new and different regulatory and economical system. Team members have different mother tongues and ways to communicate, they have different perspectives of the world and ways of taking in and processing information. They have different expectations about the other member's attitudes and behavioural norms, particularly concerning issues such as emotional display, decision making, conflict resolution and leadership. They may have stereotypes about each other and probably different status within the company, with varying access to resources within the geographical spread (Davison & Ward 1999:19). Finally, the members also may have to meet and work virtually, meaning within distance. Therefore those teams often constitute a challenge to manage. The difference of cultural and national backgrounds

makes the formation and the implementation of the team more difficult than for national teams that share the same cultural assumptions and perceptions (Lopez 2005: 24-34). Cross-cultural teams face added layers of complexity that lead to frequent communication problems. Companies are usually not proactive enough in solving these difficulties before they create serious and costly problems. In additions, such teams have to achieve good profits as they are costly to maintain (Davison & Ward 1999:12, 32).

Three different trends explain that multinational teams are necessary for MNCs. They are going to be more and more numerous in future and they need to be effective. The first trend is the increasing commercial and economic interdependence between countries, called 'globalisation'. Thus, people from diverse locations have to be gathered to work together. The second trend is that the increasing complexity of diverse issues such as medical, scientific, environmental and commercial, brings the need for individuals to work together and collaborate, in order to better solve problems and take advantage of the opportunities. People have to form teams more often. The last trend is explained by the important information revolution. The information technology makes possible for people from different geographical locations to work together without much cost and in a short period of time. (Davison & Ward 1999:14-17.)

Cross-cultural teams have many different advantages compared to national teams. They facilitate the creation of global strategies that take into consideration local requirements. They enable the organisation to take advantage of a diversity of perspectives that better fits the demand of their client. Multicultural teams also improve the organisational knowledge about the global market. Such teams maximise the use of resources as they avoid the duplication of effort. Moreover, being part of a multinational team is an enriching experience that increases the personal development of individuals. Finally broader targets can be set, that will have an impact on many different countries simultaneously (Davison & Ward 1999:17). As shown in table 2, Adler outlines four main advantages of diversity in multicultural teams. First, diversity enables increased creativity. Indeed, there is a wider range of perspectives, more and better ideas and a weaker probability for groupthink. Second, diversity forces enhanced concentration to understand others' ideas, meanings and arguments. Third, a greater creativity can lead

to better problem definition, more alternatives, better solutions and decisions. Fourth, teams can become more effective and productive (Adler 1997: 132).

Table 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Diversity in Multicultural Teams (Adler 1997: 132).

Advantages	Disadvantages
Diversity permits increased creativity	Diversity causes a lack of cohesion
Wider range of perspective More and better ideas Less groupthink	Mistrust Lower interpersonal attractiveness Stereotyping More within-culture conversations
Diversity forces enhanced concentration to understand other's	Miscommunication Slower speech : Non native speakers and translation problems Less accuracy
Ideas Meanings Arguments	Stress More counterproductive behaviour Less disagreement on content Tension
Increased creativity can lead to	Lack of cohesion causes an inability to
Better problem definition More alternatives Better solutions Better decisions	Validate ideas and people Agree when agreement is needed Gain consensus on decisions Take concerted action
Teams can become	Teams can become
More effective More productive	Less efficient Less effective Less productive

However, they have some disadvantages. Indeed, individuals can face two contradictory interests or opinions between the team and their local manager. So some persons can be torn between them and it can lead to difficulties to make decisions. It can also be challenging to find agreements. In addition, language and communication difficulties can result to a slower process to reach the maximum level of effectiveness. Persons working far away can feel very isolated, have a lack of motivation and problems can arise in family life. Local issues can also be left behind. Moreover, there is a greater risk of conflict as the opinions differ a lot. Some cultural misunderstanding can occur and

particular cultural habits can offend some members of the team. A high initial investment in cultural training, people and technology is necessary for those teams to avoid expensive mistakes. Finally, some difficulties are experienced to provide fair reward and evaluation (Davison & Ward 1999:17). Adler (1997: 132) presents three different disadvantages of diversity in multicultural teams, as the table 2 shows. First, diversity causes a lack of cohesion. Indeed, mistrust, miscommunication and stress disrupt the group cohesion. Second, a lack of cohesion causes an inability to validate ideas and people, agree when consensus is needed, gain arrangement on decisions and take concerted actions. Third, teams can become less efficient and productive.

Multicultural teams have generally an important role to play in global firms which need them to compete in the global environment. The MNC's ability to manage cultural differences in such groups will be a significant determinant of success in international business in the future. The composition of cross-border teams is crucial when creating them. They differ in many ways compared to culturally homogeneous teams and their particular characteristics have to be taken into account beforehand. The cultural background of team members has to be taken into consideration in addition to the functional and linguistic skills required. An ideal teamwork includes persons who share homogeneous skills but heterogeneous attitudes. The appropriate mix of people has to be chosen to constitute a team. The combination of cultures has to be harmonious and avoid the dangers of vested national interests and historical competitiveness (Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 14-15). In addition, not too many nationalities have to be part of the team. A study showed the higher the number of nationalities the more team members stated that they did not want to work on the team again and the lower they evaluated their team spirit (Davison & Ward 1999:27).

According to Hofstede, culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy and cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster. Nevertheless, cross-cultural teams have to build on their differences as a basis for their group work. If they are well managed, the cultural differences of team members have the potential to outperform the effectiveness of single-cultural teams (Lopez 2005: 24). The

international experience of the team members also plays an important role in the performance of the team.

2.2.2. International experience among team members

In MNCs, a solution to manage cultural diversity is to develop cultural sensitivity and awareness among employees. A way to do so is to enable managers to get international experience such as expatriation early in careers. Other solutions exist to counter the ethnocentricity of domestic managers and develop their cultural awareness. They are language training, membership on international task forces and global content in all management training programs (Lane & Distefano 1992: 53, 54). All these international experiences are valuable for MNCs. Indeed MNCs must use inpatriation (that is to send employees from subsidiaries to headquarters) as well as expatriation as a strategic tool. This tool will have the objective to develop managers with a global orientation. It can also be used to manage key organisational and country relationships. Individuals having an international experience also have a key role in coordination and integration. Managers that acquire global awareness and cultural sensitivity create stocks of social and intellectual capital. Social capital is the relationships internal and external to the MNC around the globe. On the other hand, intellectual capital is the individual manager's stocks of explicit and implicit knowledge and experience. This social and intellectual capital becomes essential when it comes to create a multicultural team. This is also crucial to the necessary and value creation integration of global operations of MNCs. Expatriate and inpatriate managers will have the key role of acquiring and sharing knowledge across the organisation (Lane et al. 2000: 207,208).

International experience and particularly expatriation develops certain skills that are different compared to those developed in domestic environment. In addition to the basic competencies needed for any managerial assignment, expatriates develop international expertise and more precisely the following capabilities: the ability to manage an international business and all the difficulties that entails, the capability to manage a workforce with different cultural backgrounds, being able to anticipate, conceive and manage the dynamics of a complex multinational environment, the ability to be open-

minded about alternative methods for solving problems, the capability to be flexible in dealing with people and systems and finally taking into account and managing the interdependences among the firm's domestic and foreign operations (Briescoe & Schuler, 2005:353). Some other benefits provided by international experience that are pointed out by global managers are certain professional characteristics such as flexibility, adjustment capabilities, open-mindedness, extroversion, humbleness and personal interest in learning and development (Suutari 2003 :202).

According to Black et al. (1992), previous overseas experience can have a positive impact on cross-cultural adjustment. The prior expatriate experience facilitates the adaptation to the cultural differences encountered in teamwork. However, some conditions have to be met. The previous experience has to be done in similar conditions and environment to really exert an influence. Conversely, the concept of cultural novelty may have a negative effect on the adjustment process. Facing a new cultural environment has a negative effect on interaction and general adaptation to the country. This is mainly due to the mistakes committed by managers when they adjust to living in a new culture. They get easily disappointed and depressed by making them. Thus they become defensive and develop certain anger toward host-country-nationals. In effect, expatriates confronted to these difficulties see them as responsible for their problems. Another reason is that expatriate managers get disrupted by the many different ways in which differences are learned, mistakes are discovered and apologies for them are made. The managers that do not face cultural novelty are more likely to adapt to the cultural diversity easily.

Moreover, Lane et al. (2000) have demonstrated the importance of foreign assignments. Cross-cultural understanding and experience are essential in today's business environment of a MNC. Foreign assignments can be a critical part of every manager's development especially those working in relation with international business. Global way of thinking is needed in organisation such as MNC. Foreign assignment is an important mechanism for developing international expertise for both management and organisational development. MNCs are aware that they need to provide such experience to many levels of managers whatever their nationality and for example in the form of a

short term development assignment. It is perceived to be an excellent learning and development experience. First of all it provides an efficient training on global issues. The creation of international teams and networks is therefore facilitated. The international experience and competences acquired is a crucial element to encourage the success of these activities. Second, it also constitutes a way to develop the potential of the organisation as well as its management (Dowling 1999: 169-173). Finally, managers that had a successful expatriate experience are often strongly committed to working in international positions and would not be ready to consider jobs in domestic settings only. This international orientation has to be taken into account by MNCs (Suutari 2003: 203).

On the other hand, many difficulties are encountered during the repatriation stage, when the expatriate goes back home. The repatriation phase has a high failure rate of 25%, meaning that 25% of the expatriates leave the company after return. The main reasons when this repatriation stage fails are that the new position does not involve as many responsibilities and challenges as during the assignment abroad and the international experience is not valued and used by the organisation. They are also highly committed to working in relation to international issues (Handler & Lane 1994: 5, 6; Lane et al. 2000: 213). Therefore being a member of a multicultural team is a good continuation and career development for expatriate managers that return to their home company. They can use the global skills learned abroad and take advantage of their international experience. Indeed, expatriate experience is a scarce resource and even a small amount of expatriate turnover can be costly to MNCs (Handler & Lane 1994:16). Therefore, the global firm must use its people who have international experience and who have been sent to international assignments. They have to be spread throughout the organisation. The jobs given to the expatriates coming back at their home company have to fit with their skills learned abroad. MNCs also have to give them the opportunity to share that learning after their return (Briescoe & Schuler, 2005:84).

In addition to the experience of the team members, the way the team fulfil its goals and the outcomes it creates are essential.

2.3. Team performance

According to Snow, Charles, Snell, Davison & Hambrick (1996: 17), team performance can be expected to precede company's effectiveness. Indeed, regarding to efficiency, cross-cultural teams have a lot of potential. If they are well managed, they can become the most efficient and successful teams of an organisation. However, they have the same chance to become inefficient, compared to homogeneous teams (Adler 1986: 86; Gahmberg & Ruotama 1999: 14; Distefano & Maznevski 2000: 46). Team effectiveness is therefore a central concern to make the culturally diverse group a success. The term effectiveness is the most often used in literature for multinational teams. The term performance is also used. Both appellations are going to be used interchangeably in this study.

First, the concept of performance in multicultural teams is defined. Then, the criteria leading to high performance in international teams are presented. Finally, the challenges faced by cross-cultural teams that hinder their effectiveness are explained.

2.3.1. Definition

According to Kozlowski and Ilgen, team performance constitutes a dynamic process. The dominant definition of team performance in the literature includes three aspects. It is defined as an Input-Process-Output model. The Input aspect represents the composition and characteristics of the team and its environment. It includes the team members' skills and characteristics and concerns the individual level, the team level and the organisation level. Processes constitute the actions that the team members implement, using their resources to achieve their goal. It also refers to the interaction between team members themselves and their environment. The way this interaction is carried on has a major impact on the performance. Output refers to the level of performance assessed by the organisation, the ability of reaching team members demand and the desire of members to stay in the teamwork. (Holland et al. 2000: 234; Kozlowski & Ilgen 2006: 78.)

High performance teams are defined as teams achieving the expectations of their organisation and whom members are highly involved to each other's development and accomplishment. They usually surpass average teams and have complementary skills, a clear sense of goal, more ambitious performance objective, a better way to cope with problem solving tasks and a greater mutual accountability than average teams. Multicultural teams with high performance constitute international teams that fulfil the characteristics of high performance teams and are constituted of persons from different nationalities. International teams are able to generate an important level of performance. (Matveev & Milter 2004: 105.)

The productivity of multicultural team is equal to potential productivity minus the losses due to faulty process:

$\text{Actual productivity} = \text{Potential productivity} - \text{Losses due to faulty process}$
--

Multinational teams have a greater potential for higher productivity than homogeneous teams but they also have a greater risk of losses due to faulty process (Adler 1997: 131-135; Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 14). Diversity increases potential productivity whereas it augments the complexity of the process that has to be implemented for the team to realize its full potential. Multicultural teams have the potential to achieve a higher level of productivity than homogeneous teams. The different backgrounds of its members enable them to function more creatively and get a greater quality and diversity of ideas. Effective teams have to consider and assess situations in many perspectives to agree on the best solution or strategy. Cross-cultural teams can more easily take into account many alternatives. They can suggest more options and solutions than do single-cultural teams. The risk of groupthink is avoided and members are more likely to better pay attention to the contributions of their colleagues. On the other hand, process losses are due to different perspectives to see, understand and act on situations. It is also explained by the difficulty to reach agreements. Moreover, misevaluation, miscommunication and misinterpretation are problematic. There is also a greater level

of stress, ambiguity, complexity and inherent confusion in the team's process. These process losses decrease productivity (Adler 1997: 131-135).

Multicultural teams frequently become the least productive in a company even though they have the potential to become the most effective and productive teams. They tend to represent either the most or the least effective whereas homogeneous tend to be on average. Heterogeneous teams always face greater communication difficulties, particularly in the beginning (Davison & Ward 1999: 20). The figure below shows the relative level of effectiveness of a series of four to six member problem-solving teams.

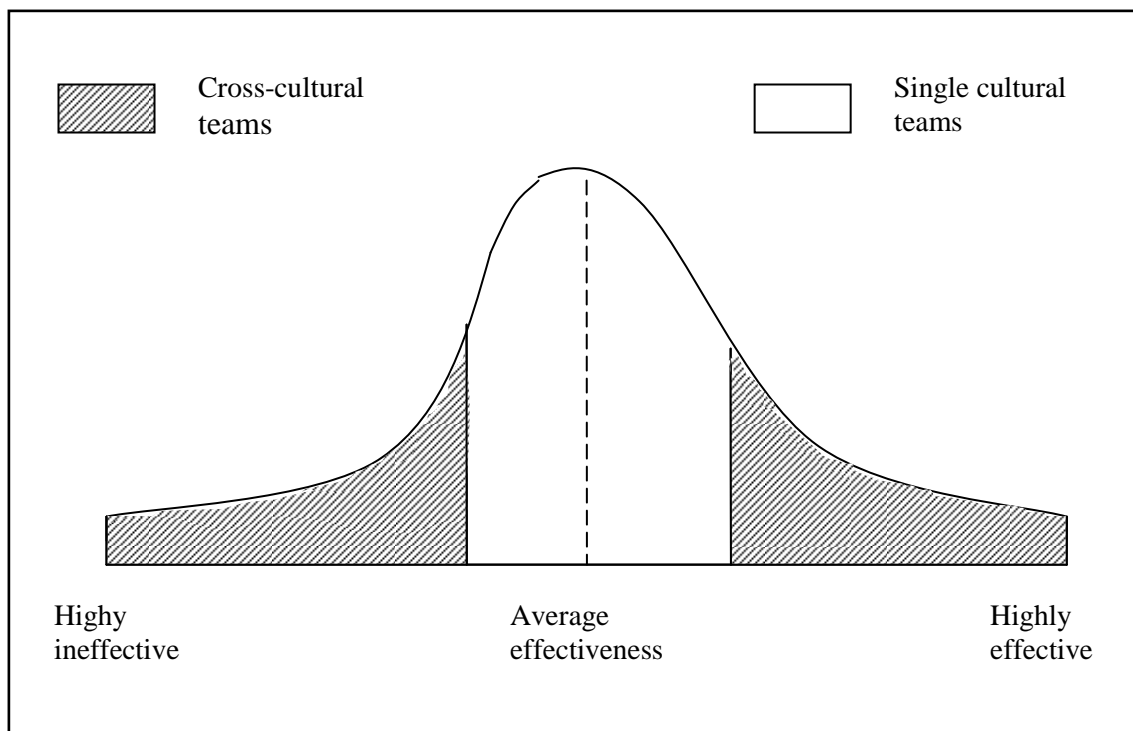


Figure 3. Team effectiveness (Adler 1997: 137).

The effectiveness does not depend on whether the diversity or not is present in the team. It depends on the way the team manage cultural diversity. If diversity is well managed, it becomes an advantage and productive resource for the team. When the diversity is not taken into consideration, or used properly, it becomes a disadvantage and causes a reduction of productivity. (Adler 1997: 138.)

2.3.2. Criteria for high level of performance

Some criteria concerning team processes enable the teamwork to have a higher efficiency. This includes clear motivational goals, a strong sense of involvement and urgency and a cooperative work. The team members also need to have complementary skills, motivation, cultural sensitivity and access to technology. Some ground rules and standards will have to be well set to foster a good level of interaction. Mutual respect and good interpersonal communication and relationships are also necessary as well as an accurate and stimulating leadership and management style. The leader of the team has to give appropriate rewards for intermediate and final goals. The chance of the team's success will also be higher if the team has control over its own resources, a good boundary management and external support and recognition. The possibility of training and development has also to be taken into consideration. On the other hand, the nature of task carried on has an important effect on the team performance as well as the nature of technology and the organisational context. Finally, the characteristics of the team members will determine the effectiveness of the team. However, each group has a different personality and therefore, no standard solution can fit with all teams. (Davison & Ward 1999: 18; Mullins 2004: 575; Matveev & Milter 2004: 107-108.)

In the beginning of the teamwork, some time has to be spent to implement the team basics. The team has also to start slowly to set up the basics and end faster. Members have to agree on a working method, roles and objectives and identify and accept differences. This method enables the individuals to have a more similar way of working as well as more similar expectations. They also become more comfortable in working and communicating with each other. Then, the level of performance increases more over time as shown in the figure 4. If not enough time is spent to agree on these important issues and the team has started the task immediately, the performance will decrease after the first stage. (Davison 1994: 85, 86, 89.)

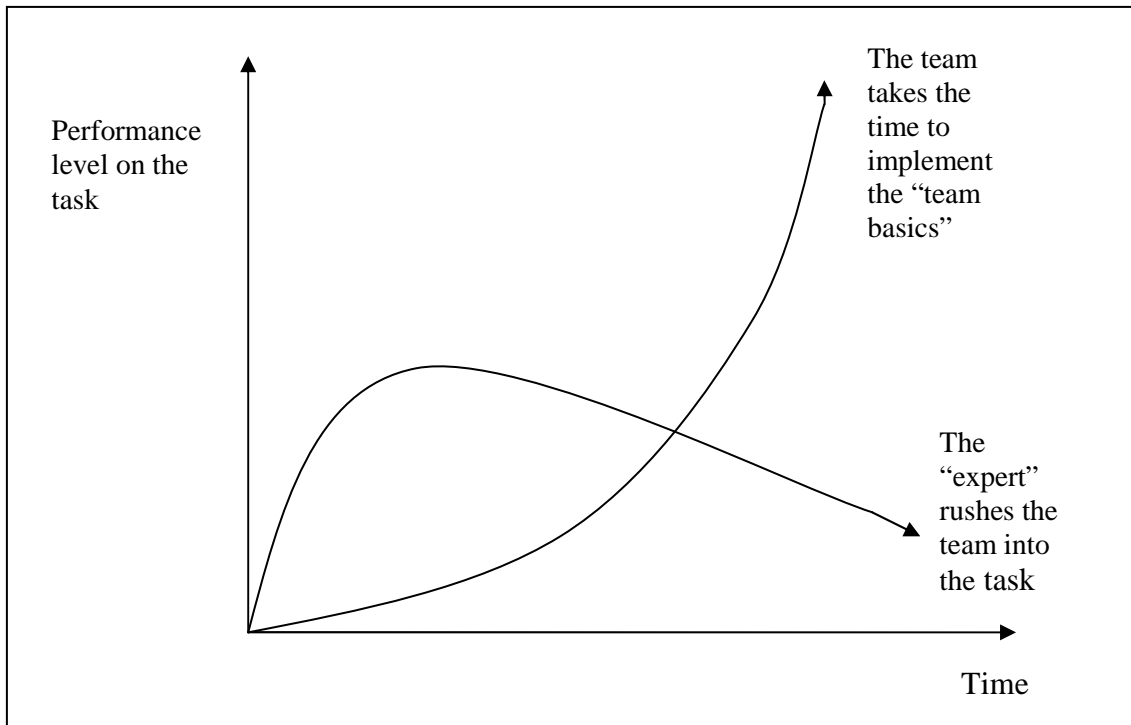


Figure 4. Team basics (Davison 1994: 86).

In addition, the team members have to be selected for their competence. To reach an efficient mix of people, members need to have similar levels of ability but heterogeneous attitudes. The individual and team accomplishment has also to be taken into consideration. A positive feedback is necessary to make the team aware of its progress. The team atmosphere has to be informal and comfortable to all members. Moreover, the team leader has to be open to planned changes, risk-taking and innovation. Each member needs to have an equal power within the team (Moran, Harris & Stripp 1993: 72). Group and intercultural skills have to be used, as well as the agreement on a common language. The team leader has to ensure that cultural differences are accepted and recognised, and the group interaction is taken into account. All members have to be integrated and the decision making process as well as the overall group process have to be controlled to avoid exclusions and unconscious alliances (Davison 1994: 89).

To be successful, the multicultural team has to be supported and facilitated by cultural norms, unwritten rules, organisational systems and structures and the human resources functions. When these conditions are created, the key element of high performing

international teams is maintaining the core identity of each member while forming creative ways of coordinating the activities of each other. Three principles are crucial to allow cross-cultural teams to be creative and committed to highly complex processes. They are practising what is advocated throughout the company, creating level playing fields from inequalities and agreeing clear ground norms for interaction. (Davison & Ward 1999: 273.)

Another major feature of an effective team is a spirit of cooperation in which the team works in a cohesive way and the members get on well with each other. In that case, team members have in mind common goals, they are well involved in the group, accept team values and rules and have a sense of mutual reliability and dependency. All members participate and decisions are made with common agreement. They talk freely and communicate information easily. They are also able to solve conflict by themselves. Emotions and dissatisfactions are expressed and the level of turnover, absenteeism, errors and complaints are low. (Mullins 2004: 529; Matveev & Milter 2004: 107-108.)

Therefore, team cohesion is another important factor of performance. International teams usually suffer from a lack of cohesion (Moran et al. 1993: 65). Cohesion leads to a greater interaction between team members, a better satisfaction and higher productivity. Some factors have an impact on group cohesion and can be utilised to improve team performance. The figure 5 presents them below. The group design or membership has to be appropriate. The size of the team, the way members complement each other and the time they spend working in the team, (the permanence), influence the level of cohesiveness. The work environment is also important to consider. It contains the type of tasks, the geographical proximity and the conditions in which the team members work, their ability toward communication and the technology put at their disposal. Then, the organisational factors also have an effect on the group cohesiveness. The level of cohesiveness will depend on the management and leadership style, the success of the group work, the eventual presence of external threat and the personnel policies and procedures. Finally, the group's stage, (forming, storming, norming and performing), influence the level of cohesiveness (Mullins 2004: 528-532).

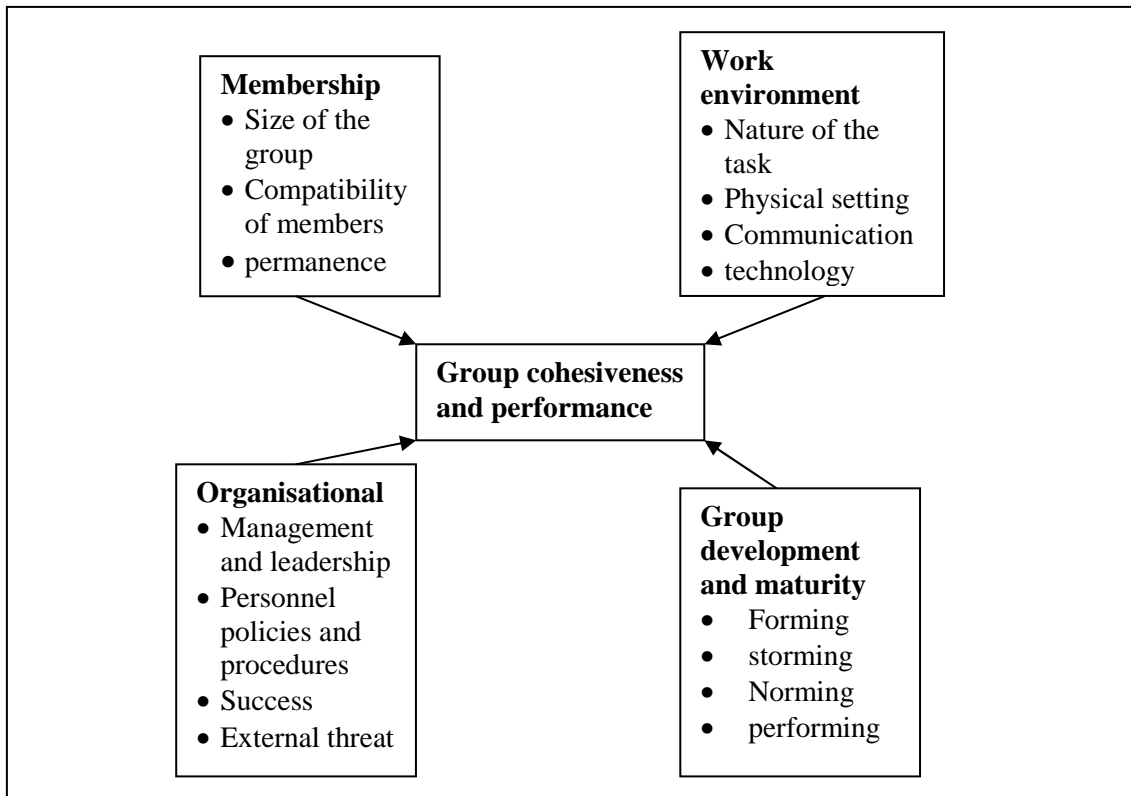


Figure 5. Factors contributing to group cohesiveness and performance (Mullins 2004: 529.)

On the other hand, intercultural competence is necessary to improve the performance of multicultural teams. Matveev and Milner (2004: 106) have developed the Intercultural Competence Model and demonstrated the importance of such competences to realize the potential of international teams. Intercultural competence regroups various characteristics. They are relationship qualities, information sharing, inquisitiveness, emotional and attitudinal skills such as empathy, human warmth, charisma and the capability to cope with stress and uncertainty. However, three major elements of intercultural competence can be identified. They are cultural knowledge, skills and personality orientation. The cultural knowledge refers to the general information the members have about cultural differences, habits, traditions, languages, leadership and management styles, and the way they communicate with foreign colleagues. Skills constitute the necessary abilities used to interact and work with team members from other nationalities. Individuals possessing such skills are comfortable to assimilate and communicate team objectives, roles and norms. Finally, personality orientation represents the interest of the team members to interact in an intercultural environment,

their feelings and level of empathy toward their foreign colleagues. The skills component of intercultural competence has a greater importance.

Moreover, structural inequalities can threaten the performance of international teams. To avoid this, leaders have to create highly heterogeneous teams with members complementing each other in terms of function, field and experience. The team number must be small and around four or five to facilitate the dynamic of the group, especially if they are supposed to be self-managed teams. Finally, the linguistic pattern has to be carefully managed to avoid dominance and interruption. (Davison & Ward 1999: 70.)

Indeed, the linguistic ability can be optimised if people are asked to slow down when talking and remove idiomatic sentences from their dialogue. Team members also need to be careful about interruption patterns, various or ambiguous meanings by checking understanding and repeating the same meaning in different ways. The complex ideas have to be broken down into a series of simple ones. Moreover, when making decisions, and interacting, everybody has to be included. Some time has to be given to talk in mother tongue so that persons can figure out what they want to say. Finally, pictures, diagrams and stories have to be used to explain something from different angles. (Davison & Ward 1999: 77.)

A facilitator is also a good way to reach a satisfying level of performance. He is an external person to the team and is responsible for identifying the problems in the team and correcting them. An international team needs a facilitator if the team leaders and the team members are not used to the complexities of working in a cross-cultural team. A facilitator is also necessary if the team is much more familiar with the technical part of the task than with the management part. Moreover, an external help is required if the task demands that all the members will be only focused on the content, or if the team feels that a facilitator could be beneficial to suggest alternative options and some feedback on how the process is managed. (Davison & Ward 1999: 115.)

On the other hand, it has been found that understaffing a multicultural team is a way to reach a better level of performance. The teams that are best performing are those whose members complain about understaffing. Indeed, recruiting fewer people than first seem to be needed lead to a better productivity and more enthusiastic team members. (Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 15.)

Holland et al. (2000: 235) have outlined the critical role of organisational context for team effectiveness. The right conditions for the international team to be effective have to be implemented rather than striving to control the attitude of the team members. A heuristic model of group effectiveness, as shown is figure 6 stresses the influence of the contextual aspect for team effectiveness. A Heuristic model is a model that sets some rules to facilitate the resolution of a problem. Task design, group composition and organisational context are the components of the external and internal team processes. They have a direct impact on the team effectiveness. The group psychological traits that represent mutual respect and trust, the flexibility and openness to learning have also an influence on the team performance.

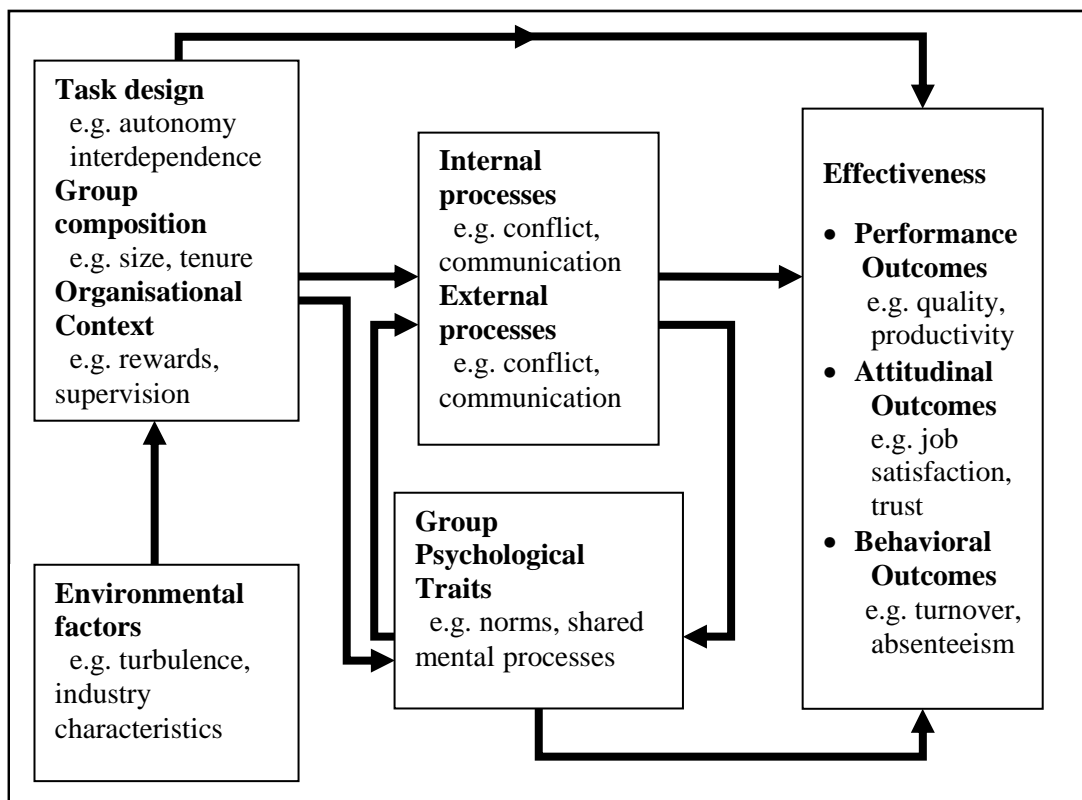


Figure 6. A heuristic model of group effectiveness (Holland et al. 2000: 235).

Moreover, some skills are needed for individual team members to reach a higher level of performance. Individual team members need a global mindset, meaning looking at things in a wider context, to think in a multidimensional way, to learn to deal with ambiguity, role shifts and political systems (Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 25). In addition, a multicultural team cannot be efficient without the qualities of its members such as openness, patience and self-control (Lopez 2005: 35). An efficient member also needs the right skills to create an interpersonal relationship with a foreign colleague using efficient exchange of verbal and nonverbal levels of behaviour (Matveev & Milter 2004: 105).

2.3.3. Difficulties that hinder performance

Empirical studies have shown that projects carried out by members from different cultures face major obstacles. Cross-cultural teams encounter problems such as unrealistic plans, unmet schedules, overrun costs and results not as good as expected. The management of multicultural teams is different than the management of single cultural teams. Different practices are necessary to take advantage of the potential of cross-cultural teams (Lopez 2005: 35). Some other areas of difficulties for multinational teams have been outlined by Matveev and Milter (2004: 108). There are difficulties to reach effective and obvious communication, appropriate coordination of team members' roles, good relationship between team members from different cultures and accurate management and conflict management styles.

On the other hand, the aspects usually observed in ineffective team works are the existence of a culture dominating and subordinating others, the lack of team goals and feedback and the ignorance of cultural differences. (Melchor Lopez 2005: 35.)

It was also stated that the higher the number of nationalities in the multicultural team, the lower the team spirit. Team members are also less likely to want to work on the team again. (Davison & Ward 1999: 26, 27.)

The organisational context is also responsible of creating troubles for international teams. When having fewer nationalities represented at the top, the company sends the message that some nationalities are more powerful and important than others. Then, the stereotypes based on economic strength are approved by the top management. The organisation may also fail to address additional difficulties resulting from a high number of nationalities. Finally, inexperienced support systems as well as some units going international before others can bring problems to multinational teams. (Davison & Ward 1999: 29.)

A team that is not functioning well has the possibility to reverse the situation through particular actions and become efficient.

2.3.4. Dynamics of a well-working team

Gahmberg and Alapiha (2002: 78, 79) have stressed the different situations that multicultural teams encounter as taking steps. There are four opposite states that demonstrate the results of particular actions and transfers from one situation to the other. The figure 7 illustrates this dynamic. The first state is a well-working group that performs well. The members get along and trust each others. There is a good atmosphere. However, if there is a lack of personnel or too much stress from superiors the situation of the group becomes negative (lean group, second state). The team faces stress and difficulties to understand each other and communicate. The members suffer from an imposed integration and language. The state of this team gets worse as the cultural differences are not tackled and this topic is avoided. There is a transfer to the third state lousy group. Disagreements, bad relations, hidden information, lack of trust and divisions in the group hinder its functioning. Providing that members discuss the cultural differences without constraints, the team reaches the fourth state of positive group with an efficient communication. Team members talking freely and accepting their diversity constitutes the best situation.

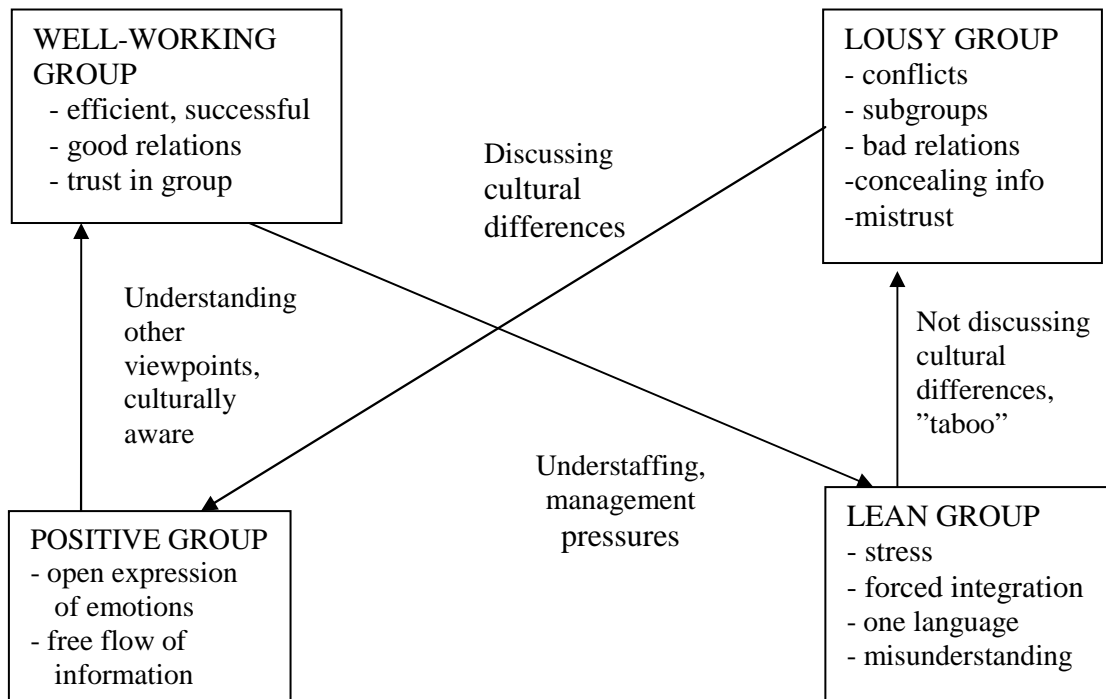


Figure 7. The opposite States and Actions of a Multicultural Group (Gahmberg & Alapiha 2002 : 78).

On the other hand, the literature has outlined that the level of effectiveness varies according to the stage of the team work.

2.3.5. Stages of the team work

A study comparing culturally diverse teams and homogeneous teams at different stages of their project has showed that overall performance remained the same for the two groups. Indeed, during the first nine weeks, the total performance of the homogeneous group has been higher than the total performance of the culturally diverse group. At nine weeks, the cross-cultural team and the homogeneous one reached about the same level of performance. Finally, in the end, there were difficulties with the cultural diversity in the multicultural team and it had a lower level of performance than the homogeneous teams. It can be noticed that the improvements in process and performance for the multinational group were more rapid. However none of them had a higher effectiveness. (Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 27.)

Davison & Ward (1999: 90, 91) have developed a model of the international team's life cycle. Four phases represent the international team's life cycle as shown in figure 8. The first phase is the start up phase. The purpose and task have to be defined and clear for all members. The personnel, technology and support have to be identified. Then the first meetings represent the phase two. Then the team has to agree on the target and the roles and responsibilities of each team member. The strengths and weaknesses as well as patterns, timing and modes of communication have to be identified. The phase three is the mid-point. The team has to carry out its agreements and respect its schedule. It also has to be able to manage conflicts such as problem solving or decision-making. The last stage is the completion also called the closing stages. The team has to ensure that the task has been completed successfully and that the outcome is effective. The performance of the team has to be assessed and the strategy and the means used to achieve this performance have to be clarified.

Eight factors constitute the main challenges to reach a high level of performance. They have to be managed throughout the four different stages of the international team's life cycle. They are the different cultural norms, the different levels of commitment to cultural norms, language fluency, the different expectations, the different leadership styles, the different cultural status, the geographical spread and the professional cultures. (Davison & Ward 1999: 90, 91.)

Adler has identified three basic stages during the teamwork process. They are entry, work and action. The diversity of the group will facilitate or make more difficult the group work according to the stage. The level of performance is then likely to be higher during a certain stage. First, the entry stage is when members get to know each other and build trust. The diversity of the team makes this phase more difficult and slower as the members are more different. Indeed, the process is based on the utilisation of similarities and the understanding and acceptance of cultural differences. Second, the work phase includes the definition of the team objectives and the description and analysis of the problem. This phase is based on the complementarities and creativity of the team members. The diversity is then used to create more ideas, alternatives and

solutions. The effectiveness of the international team is therefore more likely to be higher in this second stage. Third, in the action stage, the team decides what option to implement and how to do it. A consensus has to be found by all members around a particular option or solution. This agreement, decision-making and concerted action represent a convergent process that require the recognition and creation of similarities. Then for this stage, diversity hinders that process and the performance is likely to be lower for an international team. (Adler 1997: 139-141.)

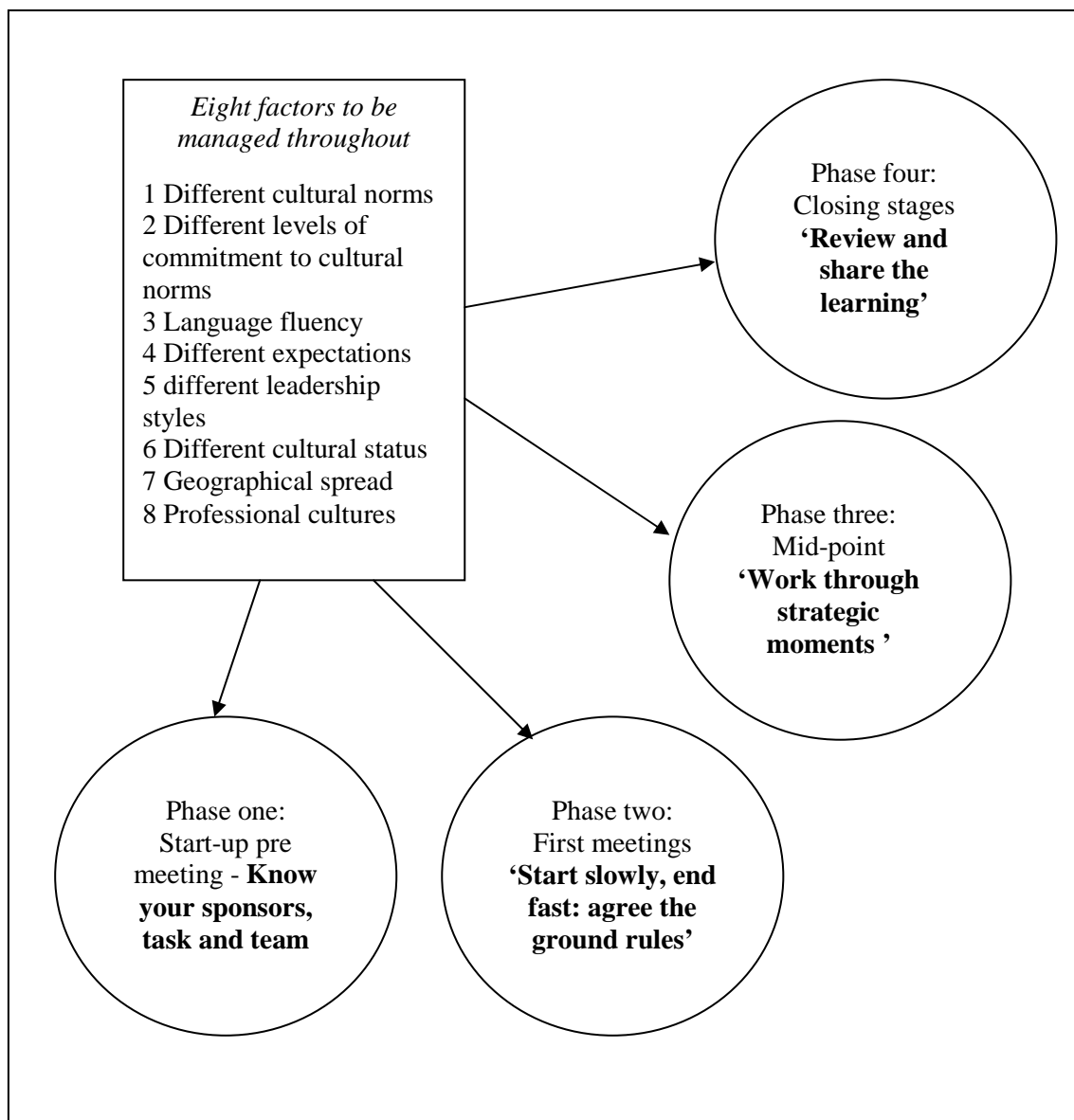


Figure 8. An international team's life cycle (Davison & Ward 1999: 90).

On the other hand, cross-cultural teams are better performing when it comes to accomplish specific tasks.

2.3.6. Nature of tasks

The aspect of nature of tasks has been stressed in the literature as relevant when dealing with cultural diversity and effectiveness. The type of the group's task has an effect on the advantages and costs of diversity in a group. The effectiveness of a multicultural team can be previewed by the type of task it has to work on. Culturally diverse groups are more appropriate and better performing for specialized and complex problem-solving task as well as for complex and costly strategies. However, homogeneous teams are best suited for routine tasks. Even though there is not significant difference between the performance of diverse culture and single-culture teams. (Gahmberg & Routama 1999: 14, 26.)

On the other hand, three types of task can be distinguished: creative, computational (meaning that clearly distinct information have to be put together and analysed) and coordinative (needs interpersonal trustiness, good level of interaction and adjustment). The coordinative task represents a problem for culturally diverse teams. However, creative tasks benefit most from cultural diversity. Teams involved in computational tasks do not see any effect from cultural diversity. (Gahmberg & Routama 1999:26.)

The biggest potential benefit is achieved by multicultural teams with challenging tasks that require innovation. In effect, multicultural teams are more skilled to carry on creative tasks and suggest more and better options to solve a problem as well as more and better criteria to assess those options. Simple, routine and repetitive tasks as well as convergent process (when agreement is necessary) are less adequate for them. Thus, culturally diverse teams should be used where the need for creativity is higher than the need for agreement. (Adler 1986: 109-112; Adler 1997: 139; Lane, Distefano and Maznevski 2000: 25.)

In addition, multicultural teams are predominantly utilised and effective to achieve global efficiency, meaning to develop cost advantages, standardize design and operations usually from the parent company to the rest of the corporation, use local responsiveness or introduce to a larger extent varied ideas and mindsets. Cultural diversity of team members can be a source of many advantages such as greater potential for creating value, innovative approaches to organisational challenges and broader operating modes such as virtual teams. They also better understand customers' needs and the teamwork is more flexible than within national teams. (Adler 1986: 81.)

To sum up, the productivity of a cross-cultural team depends on its stage of development, its task, and the ways in which its diversity is managed (Adler 1997: 138). The interactions that shape the dynamics of the team also determine its level of performance.

2.4. Multicultural interactions and team effectiveness – The MBI model

The concept of interaction is an essential component of team performance. The way team members interact with each other has a direct effect on the team performance and the contentment of its members (Holland et al. 2000: 234; Mullins 2004: 555). However, multinational teams face a more complex pattern of interaction. In effect, the presence and effect of cultural differences lead to a more difficult interpersonal interaction in multinational teams than within national teams (Davison 1994: 81; Davison and Ward 1999: 19.)

Interaction in international teams is influenced by cultural and organisational factors. Concerning cultural factors, the level of difference existing between the cultural norms of the team members and the degree they manifest them will determine the way the individuals interact with each other. The different ways members communicate such as language fluency, communication patterns and participation will also impact on interaction. Finally, the different leadership styles and expectations about the processes of the team will also matter. Regarding the organisational factors, the status of the

different cultures within the organisation, the geographic distance of the members and the differences between their professional, functional and other norms will have an effect on the team interaction. (Davison & Ward 1999: 34-64.)

On the other hand, Lane et al. (2000: 25-61) have discussed a model explaining the impact of culture on intercultural effectiveness through the quality of interaction between team members. This is called the MBI model due to the three necessary skills; Map, Bridge and Integrate, leading particularly multicultural teams to high performance. This model explains how to manage cultural diversity for personal and team effectiveness. First, Mapping consists of understanding cultural differences through several cultural maps. The cultural orientations framework, as cultural map, has to be used to explain and predict other's attitudes and behaviours. When practising mapping, managers identify better and better cultural patterns, values and actions of other persons as well as understand the situations from the other person's perspectives. Second, Bridging differences through communication represent the action to communicate effectively across cultural differences. In a cross-cultural context, three skills that represent different stages are important for an efficient communication: preparing, decentering and recentering. The preparing stage includes getting ready to communicate efficiently, with motivation and confidence. Decentering refers to moving into the perspective of the other person to communicate in a way this person will understand and paying attention to what the other say to understand this person from his or her point of view. Information has to be explained without any judgement and some empathy is also required. Recentering represents the establishment of a common point of view and the agreement on common norms. The third skill is Integrating to manage and build on the differences. It means to generally manage the cultural differences. Three main integration skills are required: building participation, resolving disagreement and building on ideas. Building participation includes ensuring that all ideas are heard, all members participate in the discussion and the different perspectives and ideas are taken into account and the team takes advantage of them. Resolving disagreement represents an efficient management of conflicts. The conflict has first to be detected, then cultural maps, effective communication and common rules have to be utilised to solve the conflict. Finally, building on ideas refers to encourage the creation

of ideas and their suggestion. To create synergies, the team has to look for ideas and solutions acceptable for everyone. If the skills of Mapping, Bridging and Integrating are implemented and practised efficiently, the multicultural team will be able to fully realise its potential and create cultural synergies.

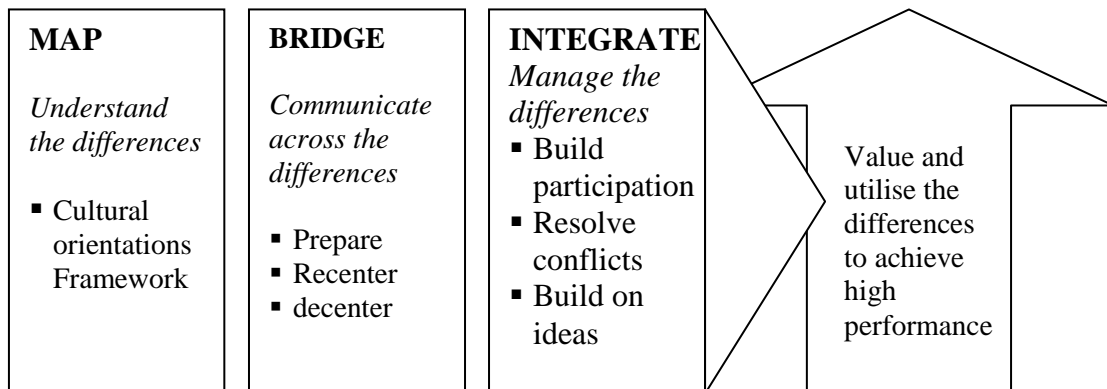


Figure 9. The MBI model (Lane et al. 2000: 25-61).

2.5. Creating cultural synergies

Multicultural teams that want to build a synergistic approach of their diversity have to capture the different resources and views provided by their international members and transform them into a synergy of innovative and effective answer to management challenges. (Lane et al. 2000: 25). Moreover, the way managers consider and manage cultural diversity constitutes the organisation's approach to diversity. A synergistic approach consists of seeing cultural diversity as both positive and negative. Then, organisations believe that "our way and their way differ" but no one is better and the creative combination of both ways results in the best practices to working and organising. However, this synergistic approach is uncommon compared to parochial ("our way is the only way") and ethnocentric "(our way is the best way)" approaches (Adler 1997: 104-106).

The synergistic approach has a different approach to diversity. In effect, it minimises the disadvantages of diversity by managing the effects of cultural diversity, not by attempting to minimise the diversity itself. The potential benefits of diversity are also optimised by managing the effects of diversity rather than disregarding them. Cultural diversity has to be seen as a significant resource in designing and developing organisational systems as well as in problem-solving. Three steps are necessary to develop culturally synergistic solutions and create cultural synergies. First, the situation has to be described from each culture's point of view. Second, the culture has to be interpreted with its cultural assumptions. Third, cultural creativity has to be developed to create new alternatives. (Adler 1997: 104-106.)

This synergistic approach is also to be applied in the context of interactions. Indeed, there are different possible results to interactions and interactive synergy is the ideal outcome. (Gahmberg & Routamaa 1999: 24.)

2.6. Relevant theories and models

This part summarises the main theories and concepts of the literature review. These points are then used to build the framework of analysis. They are benefits and drawbacks of diversity in multicultural teams, international team performance, criteria and conditions for performance and international experience among team members.

Diversity in teamwork brings many advantages such as a wider range of perspectives and ideas, a better empathy towards other's ideas and arguments and a better creativity. However, diversity also leads to greater challenges and disadvantages such as mistrust, miscommunication and stress. A lack of cohesion is another common risk that results in difficulties to find agreement and validate ideas and people.

On the other hand, the international experience of team members raises their cultural sensitivity and global awareness. Therefore they are more likely to better accept and

manage cultural differences and develop a synergistic approach to the multicultural teamwork. Moreover, managers that are less confronted to cultural novelty due to a previous expatriate experience or any other international experience are also more likely to adjust more easily to the cultural diversity. They will also be better able to promote integration as well as cultural acceptance within the multicultural group work. On the other hand, repatriation is a problematic stage for MNCs. Therefore, taking part of a multicultural team is a good continuation and career development for expatriate managers that return to their home company. They can utilise the global skills learned abroad and take advantage of their international experience. Moreover, the company will, by this way, avoid losing a valuable manager and a scarce resource.

Multicultural teams have the potential to become highly effective. However, they often become the least effective of the organisation because diversity is not managed correctly. Different models presented reflect this ambivalence between the positive and negative sides of diversity.

Some specific criteria have to be applied for a highly effective team. Even though each team is unique and will react differently to the same management. Some time has to be spent on team basics to maximise the international team's chance of success. Members have to agree on common rules, clarify team's goals and each member's role. An appropriate management style is also necessary as a positive feedback and an informal atmosphere are required. The decision-making process has also to include everybody. The managers have to foster team cohesion and spirit of cooperation. Intercultural competences, including cultural knowledge, skills, and personality orientation are also important to consider. The organisational context has also a role to play for international team performance. It has to create the right conditions to maximise their high potential.

The level of performance of multicultural teams vary according to the teamwork's stage there are engaged in. Indeed, some stages and processes are more appropriate for international teams. For example, the work's stage demanding creativity and divergent processes are well appropriate.

Table 3. Relevant theories and models.

Authors Concepts	Adler	Davison & Ward	Gahmberg & Alapiha	Lane Distefano & Maznevs ki	Kozlo- ski & Ilgen	Holland Gaston & Gomes	Matveev & Milter	Davi- son
Advantages/ disadvantages of diversity	x	x						
Cultural sensitivity / global awareness				x				
Input-process- output model					x	x		
Team effectiveness	x	x						
Team's basics								x
Intercultural competence model							x	
Dynamics of a well-working groups			x					
International team's life cycle		x						
Type of tasks	x							
MBI model- Impact of culture on intercultural effectiveness				x				

Some tasks are also more suitable for cross-cultural teams. They are specialised, challenging and complex tasks. The dynamic of interactions is more complex in international teams. Interpersonal interactions have to be satisfying and frequent to maintain a good performance.

To create cultural synergies within international teams, cultural differences have to be accepted, understood in a first time and then discussed and utilised by the team members. This method is necessary to build value on differences. It also enables to fully realise the potential of multicultural groups. Managers have to believe that cultural differences have positive and negative effects and the negative effects can be managed to be minimized. The way diversity is considered and managed will have the most important impact on the effectiveness of international teams and the possible creation of synergies.

2.7. Framework of analysis

The framework of analysis of the study is presented in this part. The conceptual framework of analysis is built and shown in figure 10. Then a check-list of the benefits of cultural diversity and conditions to reach a good performance is presented. The elements of the checklist will serve as a basis for the research part and will be tested empirically. Some examples of interview questions are also presented.

Some particular conditions are necessary for international teams to reach a high level of performance, as shown in figure 10. The characteristics of the multicultural team have an impact on its way to perform, according to previous research. In literature, international teams studied are characterised by certain background variables. The background variables chosen in this study and based on the literature review are the level of cultural diversity, the level of international experience of team members and the nature of task.

First, the organisation has to create the necessary conditions for the performance of international teams. A good access to the appropriate technology, an accurate management style with external support and reward system and training are for example, required.

Second, the members' skills and behaviours have to be adapted. Members need motivation and complementarities between each other. Intercultural competences as well as clear rules and goals are also necessary.

Third, there is a need for efficient interactions within the international team. By mapping, bridging and integrating, the cultural differences have to be understood and discussed, a good level of communication has to take place and the differences have to be managed and overcome.

On the other hand, benefits and drawbacks that influence the performance of the team can be identified. The main benefits of cultural differences are an increased creativity, higher concentration to other's perspectives, better problem-solving and decision-making. The main drawbacks are a lack of cohesion, difficulties for agreements and consensus on actions and decisions.

The performance of international teams also varies according to the stage of the teamwork. This final conceptual framework is partly based on the MBI model of Lane, Distefano and Maznevski. However, it has been created for the development of international teams. The framework presented in figure 10 has therefore been adapted to answer the research questions of the study and to identify the conditions leading to performance as well as the effects of cultural diversity in terms of performance.

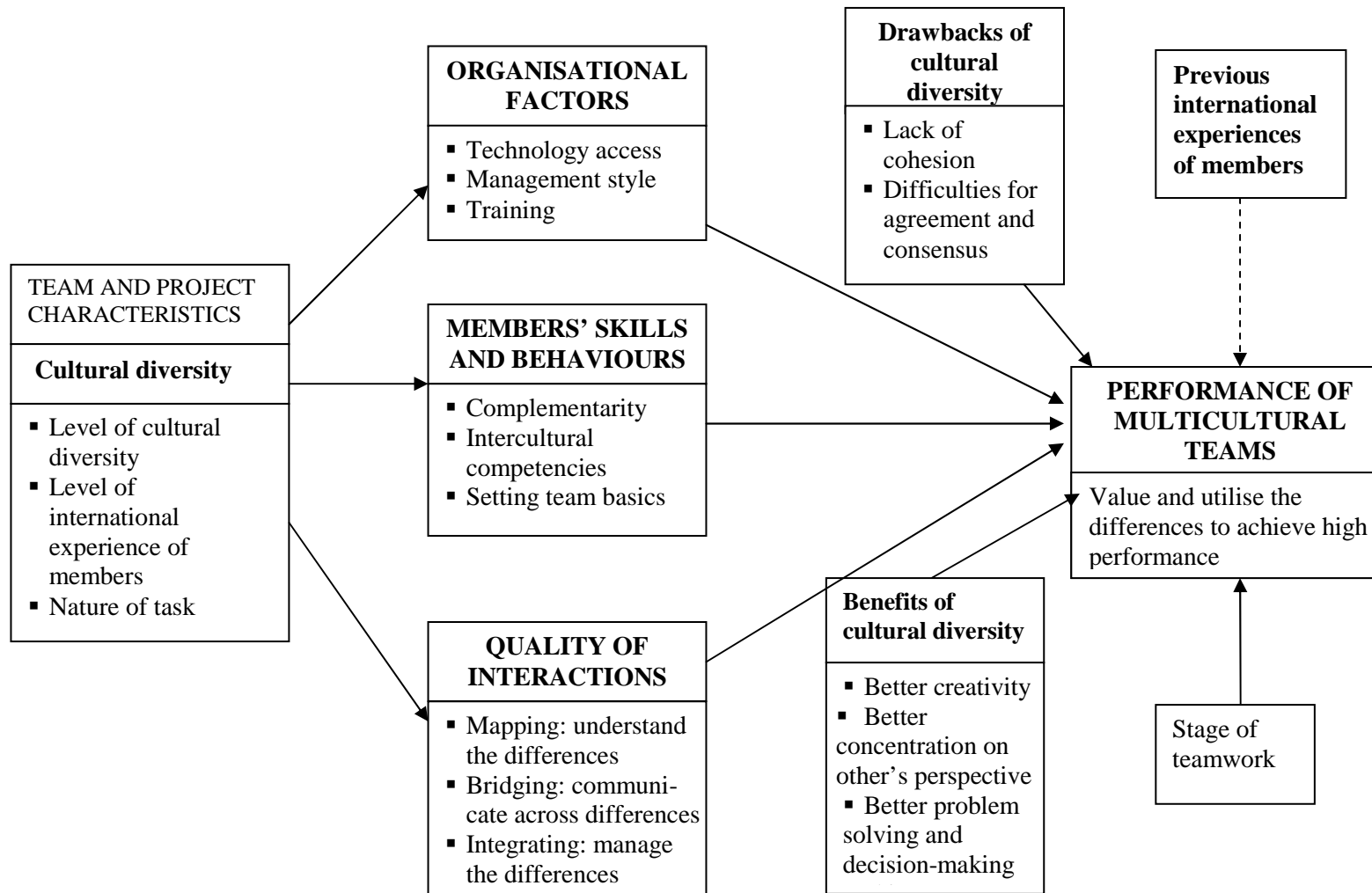


Figure 10. Final conceptual framework of the study, based on the MBI model of Lane et al. 2000.

Here is a check-list that represents the basis for the research part of the study:

Benefits of cultural diversity in term of performance:

- Increased creativity
- Better concentration on other's perspectives
- Better problem solving
- Better decision-making

Conditions to reach a high performance:

- Organisational factors
 - Technology access
 - Management style
 - Training
- Members skills and behaviours
 - Complementarity
 - Setting team basics: clear goals and rules
 - Intercultural competences
- Quality of interactions
 - Mapping: understand the differences
 - Bridging: communicate across differences
 - Integrating: manage the differences

These elements are going to be tested empirically by semi-structured interviews. For instance one of the question that is going to be asked is: “ can you mention the positive and negative effects of cultural diversity on performance? “. Another question used is: “Do you think that understanding and taking into account cultural differences can have a positive impact on the performance of the team ? “.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter presents in a first part the general research approach of the study. Then, a second part explains the data collection process in details. Those data will represent the empirical basis of the thesis. The chapter also includes the description of the data analysis. The last part discusses the validity and reliability of the study. The aim is to present the overall strategy and design of the research and to explain these choices.

3.1. Research approach

The general research approach of the study is deductive. A deductive approach means that the framework of analysis is built according to the prior theoretical part or literature review. The conceptual framework is then tested empirically and these empirical findings are compared with this framework and the hypotheses of the theoretical part. Then the theory is either confirmed or needs to be modified according to the findings. Another research approach exists; the inductive approach. However, a lot of literature exists about multicultural teams so it appeared to be interesting to start the research by reviewing it. The existing theories utilised in the theoretical part can therefore support the research and enable to build a substantial and extensive conceptual framework of analysis. This is the reason why a deductive approach has been chosen.

On the other hand, the design of the study is qualitative. The sample of data collected is smaller than for quantitative data but the quality of these data is increased. The phenomenon is then studied more in depth. The topic investigating multicultural teams is more appropriate to in-depth research method as details about the situation where these teams are beneficial are required. Even though the main elements of the conceptual framework can be quantified and measured, a quantitative research would not provide as many useful information as a qualitative study.

The purpose of the research questions is both descriptive and exploratory. The two main research questions concerning the benefits of multicultural teams and the conditions to get those benefits are descriptive. The goal of a descriptive research is to define a precise profile of individuals, facts or situations. The sub-question, regarding the role of expatriate experience on the multicultural team performance is exploratory. Exploratory studies investigate new insights and explore a pretty new phenomenon. The relation between expatriate experience and higher abilities in multicultural teams has barely been studied in the literature.

3.2. Data collection

The method used for data collection is semi-structured interviews. This method is particularly appropriate for exploratory study. It also enable to collect a rich set of data in a relatively short period of time. Moreover, interviews enable to create trust and interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. Participants are also usually more willing to be interviewed than to fill a questionnaire. In addition, in this research, the number of questions is rather high, some of the questions are somehow difficult to understand and some flexibility is needed in the questioning. Consequently, a semi-structured interview is the best choice in these conditions. Indeed, semi-structured interviews enable to guide the interviewee in the topic of research by following pre-established themes and questions while allowing a certain flexibility. The interviewee is offered the possibility to develop some issues with open questions. The order of questions can vary from an interview to another and some questions can also be added. Thus, this type of interview gathers the advantages of structured and unstructured interviews and represents a good compromise between these two types of interviews.

The interviews conducted were problem-centred interviews. This means that the data were collected on a precise area and a particular topic was stressed in the interviews. Moreover, the questioning starts with social characteristics of the respondents. A

predetermined guideline is used by the researcher to make sure the same questions are asked to the interviewees. Interviews are recorded and notes taken to take into account the details of the interview process with observations and impressions. (Shank 2006: 49.)

A template including the questions of the interviews was prepared. The set of questions was divided into six themes. A short explanation followed the headline of each theme. The main elements of the study such as cultural diversity and expatriation were also defined there. Then some predetermined questions were prepared for each of the themes. An introduction paragraph presents the researcher, the purpose of the study and the research questions. Information about confidentiality of the data and duration of the interview were also mentioned. The table 4 presents the themes of the interview and their purposes for the interview and the research. The first questions were willingly closed-ended questions, so that they are the easiest to answer while the respondents get more familiar with the interviewer and the topic of research. More open-ended questions were asked afterwards. Finally, in-depth questions, mostly comparisons between different experiences of the respondent, confirmation of certain points and more open discussion, were kept for the end of the interview. This interview structures is also due to the fact that descriptive data are aimed to be collected in the first stage of the interview with the two first themes: respondent information and case general information. More evaluative data are willing to be collected in the rest of the interview. In the end of the cultural diversity part, the MBI model of Lane et al. (2000) is tested. In effect, the conceptual framework of the study is partly based on this model. This model includes three main elements and each of them was tested by a specific question.

Twelve interviews have been conducted. Most of them were face to face interviews. Two of them were phone interviews. All the interviews were recorded. The data were collected for a period of one month. An interview lasted about 45 minutes in average. The interviews were transcribed from tape records shortly after the interview process. This enable to avoid misunderstandings and recount the answers of interviewees as close as possible from the reality. It also enable to note additional information and impressions about the process in itself as these information are still present in the mind

of the interviewer. A saturation point has been encountered after eight interviews. The same elements were repeatedly mentioned along the interviews and no new ideas were found after the eighth interview.

Table 4. Themes of the interview process and their purposes.

Themes	Purposes
Respondent information	Defining the background details of respondents and ensuring the diversity of the interviewees
Cases general information	Introduction and general information about the main topic: international team
International teamwork experience	General impression of the respondents on the topic of international teams, according to their experiences
Performance of international teams	Evaluation of each case performance
Cultural diversity	Finding the effect of cultural diversity on performance and testing the MBI model
Expatriation and other international experiences	finding the role of previous international experiences in multicultural teams

3.2.1. Background information of the respondents

The respondents have willingly different degree of international experience. This difference of experience enables to compare the views of international teams between highly experienced persons on the subject and persons with lower international exposure. When interviewing people with different level of international experience, it becomes possible to demonstrate the role of international experience such as expatriation. Thus a comparison can be done between these persons and conclusions can be drawn from that. Most of the respondents were Males. Nine of them were males and three were females. Six respondents were from the age group 31 to 40 years old. Three were from 51 and more. Two respondents were from the age group 41 to 50 years old and one was under 30. The interviewees worked in four different Multinational Corporations: Wärtsilä, Citec Engineering, Angola LNG and HIC Holland. The respondents were from seven different nationalities: four Finnish, three French, an American, a Dutch, a Japanese, a Moroccan and an English. This diversity of nationality

ensures the absence of any bias caused by the existence of only one nationality among the interviewees.

3.3. Data analysis

The method used to analyse the data is content analysis. In content analysis, data are seen as representations of texts, images and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted and analysed on their own meanings. Data are analysed in the context of their uses. This is the main difference between content analysis and other analysis methods.(Krippendorff 2004.)

The data were analysed by using an ethnographic software to face the complexity of analysis: NVIVO software. This is an Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, CAQDAS. This software was used for coding and categorising the transcribed interviews from tape records. (Maylor, Harvey & Blackmon 2005.)

A structured analysis was conducted with this software. This enables to make a comparison between the findings and the conceptual framework of the study, in a rational way. Thus, this represents a guide to analyse and interpret the findings. It also allows to discover new aspects and differences with previous findings presented in the literature review. A structured analysis studies how the data fit within the pre-existing framework, it also searches for patterns and confirm or refute proposition. This is an appropriate method when using interviews as data collection. (Maylor et al. 2005.)

3.4. Reliability and validity of the study

Reliability is generally about getting the same results of a research that has been conducted on different occasions. Reliability includes reliability of measurements, accuracy of type and consistency. Reliability of measurement concerns the accuracy of

the measurement system. It means that the same results are obtained if we keep measuring the same thing. Accuracy of type is about the reliability of the instrument used to collect the data. This means that if we measure the same thing with other instruments, the same results are obtained, except if the instrument used provides a unique view of the problem. Finally, consistency represents the role of each question of the test. It is reached when each question asked includes a small version of the whole measuring program. (Shank 2006: 110.)

The reliability of measurement has been optimised by realising many qualitative interviews. Twelve interviews have been done and some of them had different cases or experiences to refer to. Thus, the accuracy of measurement system is here ensured when keeping measuring the same thing and getting the same results. The accuracy of type has been verified carefully in accordance with the design of the study. Semi-structured interview is a perfectly accurate instrument for the qualitative research undertaken. To preserve consistency, each question has been carefully created and verified according to the research questions and the whole set of questions. Moreover, the researcher conducted by herself all of the interviews to ensure all questions are asked and understood in the same way. The interviewer also made sure she understood well the answers given by recapitulating the main points and asking for confirmation.

Validity is concerned with whether the research findings represent the reality and are true. Validity refers to truth. The results found and observed are then required to correspond to what really happened in reality. Indeed, many biases can prevent the validity of a research. For example, contextual factors such as company lay-offs, management instructions, changes in the interviewee's profile during the research can have a major impact on the data and the findings at a certain time. Moreover, personal factors such as interviewee's interest to answer in a certain way or willingness to answer in the way the interviewer wish to, are also likely to intervene in the validity of the findings. Finally, ambiguity about causal relationships between two variables can also affect the validity. (Saunders et al. 2000: 101-102.)

Concerning the background information of the respondents, their companies and their career paths have been checked carefully to ensure the non existence of contextual biases. Possible biases about personal factors were also examined and taken into account. Moreover, the diversity of cases was a priority for the interviews. Persons from different nationalities, companies, fields, home countries, ages and gender were chosen to preserve the validity of the results. Two pilot interviews were conducted in the beginning of the data collection to test the set of questions. No major change was required. Only the way to ask some questions has been modified to ensure the full understanding of the respondents. In addition to the tape records, some notes were taken particularly about the contextual elements of each interview that could affect the findings. The transcription of the records was made as soon as possible after the interview. The data collection and analysis were carried on during a relatively short period of time. Thus, the interviews were still present in the mind of the researcher when analysing and interpreting the data. These measures enable to ensure that the transcription and analysis of the interviews is as close as possible from the reality. Finally some precautions have been taken to not influence the respondents in their answers. Neutrality in the formulation of questions was established as well as a certain order of the questions so that they do not affect the responses.

4. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

This fourth chapter outlines the empirical findings of the research. They are divided in four themes. The first theme presents the main characteristics attributed to international teamwork experiences and performance. The second explains the impacts and particularly the benefits and disadvantages of cultural diversity on the teamwork process and effectiveness of international teams. The third part describes the necessary elements and conditions to reach a good level of performance in international teams. The last theme concerns the support given by previous international experiences such as expatriation to deal with international teams.

4.1. Working in international teams

The first part aims at presenting the general impression of the respondents about teamwork experience in international teams. Their feelings, observations and opinions about working in an international team are presented in this section. Then the second part deals with the level of performance in international teams compared to single cultural teams.

4.1.1. Teamwork experience

The respondents all saw their teamwork experiences in international teams as positive. They explained the positive aspect with the way they feel and they behave in the team.

“Generally speaking, I think it’s positive, if you have the right attitude.”

They also related this positive aspect with good performance they achieve and the absence of bad experiences. Some negative aspects have been mentioned but there were much fewer than the positive ones.

“Positive, I’ve never had bad experiences in my teams. So it’s a positive impression.”

Working in an international environment and being an expatriate is something the interviewees really liked in general. The fact to stay in contact with your own culture is also something important that may represent a reason to appreciate the work abroad. Working in international teams is seen as a pleasant work. It involves contacts and communication with foreigners. As an expatriate, you can also have a good quality of life with transport, accommodation and education for family arranged by the company.

“Well, I like it very much. It’s a big benefit to work in such a company where you can work with different cultures, I really like it.”

“It’s positive, because I like it to be a foreigner and an expatriate. I work in what I’m good at, meaning that being with my own culture from abroad. So I really like it. I would even say, I could not work differently. This is one of the key things I like in my job.”

Most of them found it was very interesting to see the differences between cultures as well as enriching to be part of a multicultural team. That is the reason why the interviewees liked it very much. These teamwork experiences are a way to learn a lot about other cultures and to discover other ways of doing the same things. Consequently, in that way, it constitutes enrichment.

“The diversity is so interesting. It’s more interesting to work with people from other cultures than just from one culture, the same culture, because then you learn something new.”

In everyday life at workplace, observing the way people from other cultures behave and think is something funny and interesting.

“It’s funny, I can see how people are behaving. It is interesting. Sometimes a person thinks some others are rude, but for me they are not rude. I’ve seen some ruder person in Japan, so it depends on the culture and the values of the persons.”

There are quite big differences of management styles according to countries and cultures. Starting your working life in a foreign culture or being exposed to that culture early in the career helps a lot to adapt well and feel comfortable with that management style. A respondent mentioned he feels even more comfortable with the host country management style than with the management style of his native country. The difficulty to manage many different nationalities has also been mentioned.

This is also challenging to work in international teams especially when you have a tight schedule to manage. It can be sometimes more time consuming when there is the language barrier and communication problems. People working with multicultural teams face sometimes frustrations. Patience is then required to overcome the difficulty.

“But it’s challenging when you have a time frame to follow and the time is really running and you are not communicating on the same level. It can be quite time consuming, especially when you face the language problem, because then it takes time to translate and then you need to be really patient and wait also the others to understand what you try to get through.”

The next section presents the findings about the performance of international teams.

4.1.2. Performance of multicultural teams

The aim of this part is to understand the performance of multicultural teams compared to single cultural teams. Concerning the overall level of performance of international teams, the results are quite divided. The majority of the respondents, that represent four interviewees, said that the performance of multicultural teams is about the same as national teams. No real difference can be seen and the cultural diversity itself does not have any influence on the overall performance of the team. It has been explained that if the outcome is similar for single cultural teams and multicultural teams, the ways to achieve the same goals vary a lot according to the cultures. In addition, the level of performance is similar between national and international teams providing that all team members are located in the same place. Indeed, if some team members are not in the

same location, then it becomes more complicated especially when it comes to respect a certain time frame. Some additional difficulties are encountered such as different time zones, language barrier and difficulty to meet face to face. Consequently, the performance may be affected. Otherwise, the level of performance depends on the individuals.

“Compared to single cultural team, I would say it’s average minus, so it’s a little bit below average sometimes and sometimes it’s average plus. I should say it depends on the team and the communication and how well they understand each other. If all team members are in the same location, then I can’t say that single cultural team performs better than multicultural team. Not necessarily, not really any differences. After, it depends on the individuals. It doesn’t depend on the level of cultural diversity. But if we have team members somewhere abroad and other here in Finland, when they don’t share the same location, then, we can have some difficulties. It can be the time, the schedule or something else.”

Three interviewees explained that cultural diversity influences the performance of the team in a negative way. The performance is hindered by cultural diversity. A team with all members sharing the same culture works better and is more time efficient. It was also explained that working with a single cultural team is easier particularly when dealing with less concrete issues such as branding, company corporate cultures and values. People from different cultures are also more likely to understand the same thing in different ways. This creates misunderstandings and more efforts on communication have to be made.

“I think it’s easier in single cultural team, it’s more time efficient, and also when you work with branding issues and that kind of things that are not really concrete, sometimes, it’s a way of understanding a brand, then it’s easier to be on the same level on the same culture. When you try to explain, thinking in a different way, sometimes it’s hard for me to understand what they think and also when you try to get the message through and they translate it into something else than I can expect. Then it takes more time.”

Two of the interviewees think that cultural diversity influences performance in a positive way, particularly when working in an international environment. Cultural diversity brings strength to the team as well as new ideas. For example, when dealing

with customers from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is an added value and a big advantage to have already in the team, members from different cultures. Especially the body language can be better understood. Thus, they can help each other to better understand their counterparts and customers and meet their expectations.

“We have different experiences, standards, cultural backgrounds, so it brings some strength to the team. By having three different points of view each time, we can more or less find the right one. For example, we have an Algerian customer, he is in front of us, talking, then I can read the signs that are not directly said, and tell the others. It’s not only about the language, it’s also about the signs, the body language; it’s a strength when you can understand those signs.”

It was observed that the respondents with the highest level of international experience were more likely to see, in average, a positive influence of cultural diversity on performance. The respondents with the lowest level of international experience were more likely to think that cultural diversity has a negative effect on the performance of the team. Most of the respondents, with a medium level of international experience stated that cultural diversity does not have a particular effect on performance.

Most of the interviewees have not noticed any variation of performance during the stage of the international teamwork and the project. They are four among the persons interviewed.

Some of the respondents recognised that the performance is getting higher as long as they get more experience on the work they are doing. In effect, learning from mistakes is an efficient way of improving the performance. It has also been mentioned that teams perform better when members get to know each other well, therefore rather in the end of the teamwork or after a certain time. Moreover, members have more difficulties to perform in the beginning of a project as they may not understand well the task, the process and the other members. Finally, the level of difficulty encountered during an international teamwork, usually drops over time with practice and cultural understanding.

“It was better performing in the end of each team and also after few years of experiences doing that. I learnt from the previous cases and implemented it as procedures or clear guidance for the new projects.”

“It works also better after some time in the team, because you need time to adapt when you’re put in a new team. Everyone is different and you never have the same group of personalities.”

A respondent mentioned that it is easier to perform well in the beginning of the project as it is less time sensitive. The end is more complicated with the deadline getting closer. That is usually when you see if someone has not understood well his role and that is also when you need to get everything together and be efficient.

To conclude, there is no significant difference between the performance of multicultural and single cultural teams. International teams are more appropriate and better performing than national teams when dealing internationally with other cultures as particular language and cultural skills are required, whereas they are more likely to face difficulties and have a lower efficiency in communication and with abstract and not concrete matters such as brand image. The level of international experience of individuals determines their ability to overcome such difficulties and optimise the performance of multicultural teams.

4.2. The effects of cultural diversity on performance

This part discusses the impacts of cultural diversity on the performance of multicultural teams. The first research question is addressed in this part. The benefits and then the disadvantages of cultural diversity are presented in two different parts.

4.2.1. The benefits of cultural diversity

The empirical findings concerning the benefits of cultural diversity on performance are presented in this section. The answers were quite similar as some particular points,

representing the benefits, have been highlighted many times by the respondents. The table 5 shows those particular points and the number of times they have been mentioned.

One of the main benefits of cultural diversity mentioned is the diversity of perspectives, outlooks and points of view you have when working in an international team. Thus, team members are able to broaden their mind when interacting with persons that have different views on the same thing. Then, it becomes also possible to develop a better project when there are diverse opinions.

“This is about the general well-being and functionality of international teams. You have different outlooks. Being in international team broadens your mind. You think about things you may have missed when you see the diversity of views.”

Another main benefit is to discover other ways of working. People from different cultural backgrounds have different methods and manners to achieve the same task. Thus, this can be enrichment for the team members to see and learn other ways of working from their colleagues. This can also lead to personal development. There are important variations in how individuals accept hierarchy and orders between cultures. Individuals are used to work more or less independently according to their culture.

“You get new views of doing things and you learn a lot from working together with other cultures. So the Finnish way is not the only one and the best way in the world, you learn a lot. It’s enrichment, definitely.”

In addition, an international team brings to the company some knowledge and expertises that are maybe missing in the company and sometimes even in the country. This can be some languages or some cultural knowledge and understanding, but also some technical skills. Consequently, it brings some strength to the company. In some cases, a multicultural team is essential to adapt to the international markets. The presence of an international team can have a direct impact on the performance with its linguistic and cultural knowledge. There are for example many advantages to have in a team, a member with the same cultural background than the customer. It becomes possible to

better understand the customer and to have a better communication. Thus, a good customer relationship is built.

“With an international team, we can have some knowledge, expertise that we are missing in Finland. We can have the language, if we are working with French projects, we need a French speaking guy to do the work, to be in contact with the customers.”

Creativity is another benefit of cultural diversity on performance. The presence of different nationalities and thus, the existence of different ideas and points of views, lead to higher creativity.

“The positive side is that there is more creativity; creative ways come about when you have different nationalities or persons, because the solution may be different. You have larger perspectives, they come with different ideas and views. It opens up more creative field.”

Finally, cultural diversity is seen as helpful for problem solving. More diverse suggestions and solutions are found in a multicultural team. Thus, it facilitates the resolution of problems.

Table 5. Empirical results for the benefits of cultural diversity.

Respondents \ Benefits	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Diverse perspectives				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Other ways of working - enrichment	X			X	X	X	X	X		X		
Knowledge about culture, language		X	X		X	X			X		X	
Creativity				X						X		
Facilitate problem-solving						X			X			

Some drawbacks of cultural diversity also emerged from the findings.

4.2.2. The disadvantages of cultural diversity

Cultural diversity also has negative aspects. Almost each person interviewed stated the benefits and automatically followed with the disadvantages that it brings. The answers were quite close to each other on this topic but more diverse than for the benefits as the table 6 shows.

In a multicultural team, there are different approaches to the work and different ways of thinking. Five respondents mentioned that element as a negative aspect as they explained, for three of them, that it is very likely to result in tensions and conflicts. For example, there are more or less proactive ways of working that may not correspond to the expectations of the team.

“People thinking in different ways are a negative aspect, for example, religion can be a problem. It can bring conflicts, tensions when people are so different.”

When team members think differently, they are more likely to not understand well each others. Misunderstanding is also one of the main disadvantages expressed by the interviewees. Four of them mentioned this aspect. Two specified that it is a matter of mutual understanding. Team members have to understand the others and they often have difficulties to get the same meaning of the same words, sentences and expressions. It is often interpreted in different ways. Moreover, individuals need to make themselves understood by the rest of the group. When a member realises he cannot be understood by the others in the way he would expect, it is frustrating for him.

“Sometime, it’s difficult to understand each other. You are from different cultures and you see the things in different ways, so it’s negative.”

“Negative is the complexity by itself. The understanding is the basic thing. When something is written black and white in a contract, the meaning varies according to the culture. For Finns, no changes can be made, but for Africans, it’s still possible

to negotiate. This is what they call relationships I think. This can have a negative impact on the performance. So they are negotiating something but not by the same understanding. So this creates conflicts.”

On the other hand, there is the language barrier that can hinder good performance. In an international team, communication problems are frequent. In some cases, the ability to speak a common language is not sufficient. Thus, a simple vocabulary has to be used. In other cases, the communication problems are due to big differences in pronunciation. This also affects the flow of communication and the level of interaction within the team. Difficulties to communicate can also result in misunderstandings and tensions in the group.

Another disadvantage mentioned by two interviewees, is conflict resolution. There are not especially more conflicts in international teams, compared to national teams. However, when a conflict arises, it is more problematic to solve it. People do not know how to behave. They are not necessarily familiar with the reactions, the expressions of persons from another culture and also the ways to handle it without hurting people and making the situation worse. The prejudices can be serious in some cases.

“I think conflict resolution on an international team is one of the big problems. I think conflict resolution is very difficult to handle. This is problematic because of the different cultures, attitudes and the baggage the people bring with them when they come from different countries.”

Working in a multicultural team can be more time-consuming taking into account the elements mentioned above. When the team faces misunderstanding and miscommunication, it slows down its functioning. Thus, it is particularly challenging when you have to respect strict and tight deadlines. However, this is especially the case when a part of the team is located abroad. Two interviewees confirmed that. There is no proximity of communication and practical matters such as time zones limit the ability for the team to function well. The quality of communication is affected. Consequently, if this is not handled correctly, the performance gets lower.

“Sometimes it can be that we are losing and some other times, we are gaining times with international teams, but it depends. There is always this time issue I would say. It can be more difficult to meet the deadline and respect the schedule, depending on where the team is located.”

Moreover, it is difficult to get the same commitment to the schedule from the persons located abroad as the work environment is not the same in the different locations. They do not feel as much concerned by the schedule.

“The commitment can have a negative effect, when we have a team working abroad. And we have some team members in Finland and others in France from the same team. Then we can have difficulties of commitment. They are not aware and committed to the schedule. They don’t feel that this is my case.”

When people talk about other persons from a different culture, it happens that they generalise about the country and culture. Thus, stereotypes appear. It was explained that members oversimplify their sentiments and a certain culture or country can be classified in that way.

Table 6. Empirical results for the disadvantages of cultural diversity.

Respondents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Different ways of thinking - tensions		X		X				X	X			X
Misunderstandings								X		X	X	X
Miscommunication	X			X			X	X				
Conflict resolution	X				X							
Time issue	X		X				X					
Stereotypes						X						

Cultural diversity brings wider perspective and higher creativity to the team. Different ways of thinking and working constitute both a positive and negative aspect, depending

on how cultural diversity is perceived and handled. The next part explains how to manage it.

4.3. Necessary conditions to take advantage of the benefits of international teams

This section aims to answer the second research question of the study. The necessary factors leading to a situation where it is possible to take advantage of the benefits of cultural diversity are presented. These factors result in high performance for the international team applying them. First, the empirical results concerning this issue are explained. Then, the results of the MBI model testing are presented. Third, the opinion of the respondents about member's skills and behaviours are demonstrated and compared with the conceptual framework. Finally, a similar discussion is held concerning the organisational factors.

4.3.1. Achieving performance through communication and relationships

A good communication is the factor mentioned as number one for many interviewees. Six of them mentioned it. A good internal communication is essential for a well functioning team. Members need to express what they have in mind and not keep it for themselves. They also need to exchange about other issues than work and spend good times together. A good interaction between members is one of the basic factors for the success of the team.

“Communication is very important between one another. So have a good conversation daily, make some fun and don't only work. Let people relax, and say what's on your mind, if something is wrong, communicate. It's very good.”

A common understanding of the project needs to be ensured. This is another main factor to take advantage of the benefits of cultural diversity. According to six interviewees, the team leader has to set clear goals and give to each team member a certain role and responsibility. Clarifying the expectations is something crucial to make the team work

in a cohesive way and towards the same goal. A full understanding is particularly required when cultural differences are big to avoid misunderstandings. This factor increases the performance of the team.

“You should have common goals, everyone should understand what the goals are and also be working towards the same goals and everyone in the team should have different roles and responsibilities and then the performance will be better, as everyone understands what they should do to reach the goals.”

Another important factor is to get to know well the team members. Five respondents mentioned this aspect. The team is more likely to be efficient if the members know each other's behaviours and reactions in a certain situation. Some time has to be invested in building relationships. Moreover, the type of management required is people oriented. Establishing the connectivity in the team is important. Thus, you can build the team and have a real team's spirit. Nobody should be excluded from the team. After a certain time working in the team, the members understand more easily one another and share more similar visions. This also leads to high performance. On the other hand, the ideal number of members in an international team is four or five as mentioned by a respondent.

“You'll always find the possibility of misunderstanding or conflicts due to people. So it's actually a key role, crucial for the team to invest the time in relationships and in people orientation. This could make the difference between good performance team and high performance team. It's already complex enough in the same cultural team. If you bring to that equation, cultural differences, they (team members) need to know each other.”

Similarly, in case the team members are not in the same location, it is very important that they meet face to face regularly, as two respondents mentioned. This is especially important in the beginning of the project as the members can get to know with whom they are working with. It improves the quality of communication and the overall performance of the team. In case it is not possible to meet face to face regularly, video conference is another alternative. You can see the person you are speaking to and it is

easier to understand each other. Body language and expressions give some useful information to your interlocutor.

“The other aspect is to have relationships in a regular way face to face. We can’t succeed if everything is done via internet or the phone. Human warmth is also required. To be in presence of those persons is one moment or the other needed. Because we’ll get the impression to know with whom we work. And for me this is a critical factor. This helps me a lot to meet the individuals in person, for performance.”

In addition, cultural differences have to be recognised, accepted and understood according to four respondents. Cultural drivers are important to consider. Religion for example is one of them. Team members need to develop cultural awareness to succeed. Thus, team members have the right state of mind to understand each other and better cooperate.

“Cultural difference is positive as long as individuals are aware of it and cultural awareness is paid attention to. It depends what the managers do with this, if they pay attention to the cultural differences, and they make sure everybody is aware of differences, sensitivity, then there is no problem. But if you ignore the cultural differences, it could become a problem, and could affect the performance of the entire team.”

Two personal qualities are necessary for persons working in multicultural teams; open-mindedness and flexibility. Individuals must be able to adjust to new work methods and perspectives. If they are too rigid and reticent to newness, this is not going to work well. Three respondents mentioned open-mindedness and two, flexibility.

“People themselves must be open and flexible enough to understand how the work should be done. This is very important. They should be flexible in terms of new ways to work which may not correspond to the ways they’re taught to work.”

Individuals should get to know some information about the cultural background of the persons they are working with. Two respondents mentioned this aspect.

“Getting familiar with the culture you are going to work is in my opinion essential.”

Concerning expatriates, it was explained that they should have the possibility to go back to their native country at regular times to see again their family and friends and take care of their personal things. This way, they can fully recover and reload their battery. After a certain time in a foreign environment, their performance decreases and they need to go back to a familiar place. When they come back, they have their full energy and capabilities to perform well.

“This has been demonstrated that if you take somebody and you send him in a totally different foreign culture, he doesn’t have the ability to get a full revitalization of his own culture. Over time, his performance drops. Sometimes it’s tiring because people make remarks on you. You need to go back home to get back your energy, your emotional and personal battery, your culture, all those aspects.”

It is also important that all the team members have an easy and similar access to information. This is especially important for the agreed issues documented. Then everybody has the possibility to consult this information freely and have the same level of documented resources.

For half of the interviewees, some particular measures have been implemented in their organisations to manage cultural differences. The more frequent is cultural training for managers travelling and working in relation to a part of the organisation located abroad, usually in a certain country. They get some basic information about the cultural background of their colleagues. Cultural training is also used to deal with foreign customers. The benefit of cultural training is to enable a better cultural understanding of the culture managers are interacting with. Organising events with the team is another measure mentioned. It can be for example a “recreation day” or a Christmas party where the members get to know each other better. It also creates a warmer atmosphere in the group. Finally, gathering people to work in the same location is a way to increase the interaction and ease communication.

The level of interaction between members is also an important factor to consider for high team effectiveness.

4.3.2. Multicultural interactions – MBI model testing

The MBI model has been tested empirically and the results are presented in this section. It includes three steps; Mapping which corresponds to understand differences, Bridging which is communicating across the differences and Integrating which refers to managing the differences. A separated question was asked for each of those points. The empirical results are presented for every step.

All the respondents said that understanding differences helps for the success of the team. Five of them specified that it is very important and even essential to accept and understand the differences in a multicultural team. The quality of the communication is higher and this increases the chances of the team to succeed.

“This is obvious. Understanding each other is essential in international team. The more you accept the other cultures in the team, the more it will facilitate the communication, and when communication is better, the chances of success are higher.”

Communicating across differences also facilitates a good level of interaction between the team members. All respondents agreed that it is necessary to pay attention to differences while communicating. According to four of them, this is an essential aspect. The communication has to be adapted to physical and mental differences of the individuals in the team. Physical differences refer to differences in pronunciation, tone, and other verbal expressions as well as body language. Mental differences concern the different ways to understand and interpret a message, including the language ability of the individuals. This adjustment of communication has to be carried on to create a bridge with people from another culture. This way, the message is received and perceived in the way intended by the sender.

“In the beginning, it is difficult because you say something and the other persons may perceive it in a different way. But then you adjust your way of communicating, to find this understanding, of course, yes, you have to pay attention to the team, the differences, definitely.”

Managing differences includes three different points that were analysed separately; build participation, resolve conflicts and build on ideas. A majority of respondents (ten of them) said that it is important to encourage participation, and sometimes even essential. It affects the performance of the team. Some opinions and new ideas are expressed and it leads to a better motivation and involvement of the team members. However, according to two of them, it can be difficult. It depends on the number of different cultures and thus, opinions existing and on the importance of hierarchy for the team members. Indeed, when hierarchy and power distance are important, individuals are less likely to participate if they are not leader. Two other respondents said it is not necessarily useful in all cases to encourage participation. One of them explained that it complicates the decision-making process.

“It’s very important because it gives everybody a sense of initiative and a sense of creating and doing something. So it’s very important, so that everybody is involved. It encourages them to work harder because they feel part of it. It’s also enrichment for the others. They bring new ideas.”

Most of the respondents (eight) stated that resolving conflicts is relevant when dealing with the close team. Conflicts should be faced and handled from the beginning, since it arises to maintain the level of performance. However, two respondents said that it depends on the situation and sometimes it can be necessary to wait. Moreover, two other respondents specified that it does not apply outside the team particularly when dealing with customers based abroad and with big cultural differences. It is better to avoid conflicts in that case because as mentioned earlier conflict resolution is problematic.

“In everyday life, if it happens in my team, I have this leadership style to be close to the guys and everything is spoken out. I face the conflict and resolve it. I tackle it immediately when it comes.”

All interviewees stated that building on ideas is very helpful in international teams. Five of them explained that it is crucial as it is strength for the company and leads to high performance. Sharing ideas and discussing them is a good way for the team to be innovative. The level of commitment among team members is also increased. It was also mentioned by an interviewee that building on each other's ideas enables to develop synergies within the team.

“I have an example where it led to a fantastic result. This is creativity. You take an idea, giving aside a credit, challenging it and everybody brings ideas and we wrap up the whole thing and we get a surprising result, so I love to work with this creative attitude. This chain of ideas leads to a good result. So this is synergy. And also everybody is a part of it so the motivation rises. It helps a lot I believe.”

To conclude, the respondents agreed on each of the three phases presented in the MBI model. The first one, Mapping, is an observing and learning phase where individuals face in the beginning the need to understand the differences and learn more about them. The second one, Bridging, requires team members to adjust their ways to communicate and interact, according to what they have learned on the different cultures. The third one, Integrating refers to building the team, by establishing the connectivity between individuals and managing their differences. In addition to the level of interaction, members' knowledge and attitudes have an influence on the team performance.

4.3.3. Members' skills and behaviours

The importance of complementarity between members has been demonstrated among a majority of respondents. Forming a good combination of competences is a good factor of success and performance in multicultural teams. It is important to use everybody's skills in a multicultural team. However, three respondents stated that it is not necessarily essential to achieve a good level of performance. In addition, it was explained that it is difficult to develop complementarity between individuals in the beginning, when they do not know each other well. It is necessary to know the strengths and weaknesses of the colleagues to better cooperate and cover all competences needed. When the team is formed, it can reach a certain balance between team members where complementarity is

an added value. Finally, it was specified that complementarity should be created between the fields of competences and backgrounds and not between nationalities.

“Each one has strengths that are covering the weaknesses of another person. But it’s not always easy to build. You can make it in really long term. When you know very well the elements of your organisation, then you can build complementary teams. Then we have the magic and the right combination. This is important for good performance.”

All respondents agreed that setting clear team basics is crucial when working in international team. Defining each member’s roles and responsibility, setting a common and clear goal for the project and agreeing on rules are very important measures for the efficiency of the team members. This is particularly useful on the individual level as each individual gets an understanding of the project and his contribution. Some time has to be spent in the beginning of the projects on this issue. This is especially important when the team is new and team members are not used to work together. Some documents, such as project charter, are used as tools to clarify the expectations, facilitate communication and avoid troubles. It constitutes a format for discussion. This aspect was already mentioned by many respondents as an important factor for high performance in the previous open question addressing this matter.

“It’s important that you have the same goals when you are starting, and each member knows his roles and responsibilities and the others can take care of this. This is very important that you know what to do, or what is your task.”

The next section presents the organisational aspects surrounding the international team.

4.3.4. Organisational factors

The organisational factors include three main aspects; management, training and technology. The findings collected on each of these matters are presented in this section.

Organisational settings were seen as important by most of the respondents, even though secondary in the face of factors such as quality of communication, interaction and relationships. Four interviewees mentioned the importance of management in the organisation. It has to be representative of the company as an entity. The team should follow the corporate culture, the rules and the settings of the organisation. The team members should also have the feeling that they belong to the organisation. To achieve this, each of them needs to feel understood by the management which thus should take into consideration the differences and accept them. An interviewee also mentioned the necessity to have a senior management sponsorship supporting the multicultural team for complex projects. It constitutes supervision at a high level. It can be determinant for success as sponsorship ensures the right conditions are met for the team to perform well.

According to four of the respondents, training and personal development becomes one time or another necessary for the international team. This is important to maintain the motivation of individuals and to give them recognition. It also increases the performance of the team.

“Generally it’s good to keep people motivated if they can participate in training and they are well rewarded and so on, then they will perform well also.”

Technology is also something determining as three respondents stated. A team is dependent on the technical tools provided by the company and it may need a particular technology to succeed such as video conference for instance. This aspect affects the potential of the cross-cultural team.

The findings confirm that three main aspects, level of interaction (MBI model), member’s knowledge and behaviour and organisational factors are all important to achieve good performance in a multicultural team, as showed in the framework of analysis. The research particularly uncovered the necessity to reach a good level of communication, to get to know the team members and share good relationships with them. Team members’ experiences also matter, as the next part explains.

4.4. The role of previous international experiences

The aim of this section is to find out the role of previous international experiences of members on the performance of the team. It answers the sub-question of the study. Previous researches have not demonstrated this direct relation between previous international experiences such as expatriation and performance in multicultural team. This section is intended to put some light on this matter and somehow address this gap. The role of international experiences is discussed in the context of culturally diverse teams and their dynamics.

The respondents have experienced three different kinds of international experiences. They are studies abroad, working in an international team in a host country (as an expatriate or not) and working in an international team in their home country. All interviewees have experienced at least one of those international experiences.

All the respondents stated that it is an advantage to have previous international experiences in a multicultural team. It leads to a better ability to work in a multicultural environment. Seven of the respondents said that it enables to have a better understanding of cultural differences and three other mentioned that it contributes to good adjustment in a new country and in presence of different cultures. Individuals are therefore more prepared and also more likely to behave in the right way in unexpected situations or conflicts. According to three respondents, these experiences also broaden the minds and people usually get more open-minded. In addition, when travelling, individuals are confronted to the reality of multiculturalism. This goes beyond theories and concepts and cultural differences get a real meaning.

“I go with my crew in dark Africa and all is different. This makes sense. You take facts that you bring home and you adjust your management, and team leadership. Otherwise it’s just a nice concept.”

However, the experiences must have been perceived as positive for the individuals to be helpful. Then they are better mentally conditioned to succeed in future international

teams as mentioned by two respondents. Indeed, international experiences affect more deeply the individuals than experiences they go through in their native country which represents a familiar environment.

“This is definitely an advantage to have had such experience. It has to be a positive experience. It will have long term effects very positive. Also the reverse is true. You’ll keep a negative experience for the rest of your life. I think expatriate experience affect us more than experiences in our own country. For me, this is obvious, this is a more thorough experience.”

Moreover, sharing previous international experiences with team members is a way to connect persons between each other. Consequently, the integration in the team is facilitated.

On the other hand, all the interviewees agreed that previous international experiences are generally helpful to increase team efficiency. An international experience is useful even if it has taken place in another country than the current assignment. Indeed, to have one or several expatriations on one’s credit represents an advantage, as it raises cultural awareness and these persons constitute an added value for their whole team and will contribute to increase its level of performance. Such experiences also raise the language abilities of the individuals.

Consequently, we can say that the major role of international experiences is to develop cultural awareness which is an important factor for the performance of multicultural teams, as seen in previous research and confirmed by the findings.

To conclude, the empirical findings confirmed that communication is a keystone of multicultural team success. A good level of interaction and relationships between individuals is the decisive factor that enables to turn to account the benefits of cultural diversity. The next chapter presents the major results emerging from the comparison between the theoretical framework and the findings of this study, as well as the conclusion.

5. MAJOR RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The final chapter concludes the study. First, the major results are presented. Second, the implications and contributions of the research are discussed. Finally, some indications for future research are given.

5.1. Major results

This part presents a comparison between the conceptual framework of the study based on a combination of existing theories and concepts on the topic and the findings of the study. The relations between the original research questions, the theoretical framework and what this study has discovered are discussed.

5.1.1. Benefits and drawbacks of cultural diversity

The major benefits of cultural diversity are higher creativity with broad and diverse perspectives and new ideas that are suggested to the team in accordance to the theoretical framework. This greater creativity leads to better problem solving, due to the existence of more alternatives. Moreover, this study showed that different ways of working and thinking can be enrichment as individuals discover new work methods with their advantages and drawbacks and can apply them differently and in other contexts. Hence, being more aware of the disadvantages, they may be minimised. In addition, international members bring some knowledge about their cultural background and language skills that are beneficial when dealing with counterparts or customers from the culture in question. However, it has not been demonstrated that the need for higher concentration to understand each other's opinion is a benefit, even though it is necessary to succeed.

Concerning drawbacks, miscommunication is one of the major problems in international teams. The flow of communication and interaction becomes slower. This is mainly due to the presence of non-native speakers and translation problems. There is also a lack of cohesion, especially in the beginning of the teamwork, as people mistrust each other, establishing stereotypes. Expatriates are more likely to face isolation, lack of motivation and family life problems with remoteness and distance. It also happens that the team has difficulties to find a consensus when there are many different ideas. Moreover, it was uncovered that time issue is another drawback. International team members suffer from stress and difficulties to respect deadlines when a part of the team is based abroad. Counter-productive behaviour such as lack of commitment to the schedule can be encountered in that case. The present research also found that different ways of thinking also result in misunderstanding which may hinder performance over time. Finally, the study did not demonstrate a higher number of conflicts in international teams but rather problems for conflict resolution.

5.1.2. Main factors for high performance

The research showed divided results about the performance of multicultural teams. In average, there is no significant difference of performance between multicultural and single cultural teams. Multicultural teams are better performing when the team is in an international environment, (dealing with persons located abroad) where it can benefit from the different cultural backgrounds and linguistic knowledge of its members. This finding is similar to the previous findings of Gahmberg and Routamaa (1999) explaining that international teams perform better in complex and specialised tasks. Indeed, the research shows that international environments are complex and can lead to specialised tasks as individuals need to adapt to the local cultures and languages, in many situations. The study also uncovered that international teams are more likely to face difficulties in communication and when working in relation to abstract and non concrete matters.

Quality of interactions and communication are the main elements that enable the team to value its differences and reach high level of performance. Indeed, good communication leads to a better mutual understanding. The research confirms the importance of the three phases of the MBI model of Lane, Adler and Distefano to benefit from cultural diversity and achieve high performance. Firstly, members need to accept and understand the differences. Secondly, they need to pay attention to differences while communicating. Thirdly, they need to manage differences by encouraging participation, resolving conflicts and building on ideas. Encouraging participation raises motivation among the team members. On the other hand, conflicts should be resolved particularly within the close team. It is better to avoid them when dealing with counterparts or customers abroad. However, the research showed that the last element, building on ideas comes after all the others and can be carried on only when a good level of interaction is reached. Once realised, building on ideas represents the right attitude and constitutes the necessary quality of interactions between individuals to reach synergies within the team.

Members' skills and behaviours are also very important to consider. Setting clear team basics as the model of Davison (1994: 86) shows, is crucial for performance and to avoid future problems such as misunderstanding on the expectations. Indeed, it is central to establish a clear and common goal and to assign particular roles to each member. The study shows that team members have to know each other well to be able to better work together and cooperate. Some events such as sport day or Christmas party are popular to develop relationships between individuals. Therefore, people have to meet regularly if a part of the team is located abroad. Complementarity between team members is another factor of success. A good combination of skills can be decisive for the success of a project. However, it is not all the time necessary to have such complementarity. Moreover, the complementarity should always be created between the fields of competences and backgrounds of the participants and not between nationalities. Intercultural competences such as cultural knowledge and language ability can also be necessary about a certain culture the team members are working with, within or outside the team. On the other hand, the study demonstrated that open-mindedness and flexibility are two essential qualities to work in international team. Finally, concerning

expatriate, they need to reload their batteries by returning to a familiar environment regularly. It enables to maintain their motivation as they are more likely to face isolation, cultural shocks and family life problems.

Organisational settings are also important in a certain extent. It was highlighted that the team has to conform itself to the rules of the management. However, the management style should be appropriate to the cultural diversity, by paying attention to differences. The management should also support the team, by a senior management sponsorship, if necessary and represent the company to give the team members the feeling that they are part of the whole organisation. The management should finally make sure that the team accepts the corporate identity. Cultural training is also an important factor and it can be necessary to develop multicultural competences, particularly to raise the understanding of a certain culture. Technology access is also determining for success. For instance, video conference can be useful to get to know better some counterparts or customers based abroad and thus being able to better understand each other and work efficiently together.

5.1.3. The Role of previous international experiences

No previous studies have made the clear relation between previous international experiences and performance in multicultural team. This section aims at discussing this relation in accordance with the findings.

Three different kinds of international experiences are taken into consideration in this study. They are studies abroad, work abroad and working in an international team in the native country. The study clearly shows that those experiences are all a major advantage when working in an international team. Indeed, the individuals get a better ability to work in such international environment with a better understanding of the multiculturalism and its reality. Theoretical knowledge about cultural diversity is not sufficient. When confronting his own culture to others, an individual really learns to adjust in a new environment and unexpected situations. Consequently, this helps a lot to

have members with previous international experiences for the overall performance of the team. However, such experiences need to be positive to be beneficial to the team as they affect thoroughly the individuals.

These experiences are useful for performance even if it took place in another country or cultural background than the present assignment. In effect, previous international experiences raise the cultural awareness of individuals and they usually become more open-minded after travelling and being confronted to other cultures. The language abilities are also increased, which facilitates communication. Therefore, team members with such experiences have better multicultural competences.

5.2. Implications

The presence of international teams becomes more and more necessary nowadays in multinational corporations. They enable global organisations to implement coherent and common strategies between its different units all over the world. Such teams also facilitate the adaptation to international markets. In addition to language skills, cultural awareness and knowledge are necessary to export products and services in a different cultural environment. The products or services of MNCs need to be adapted to meet the expectations of the foreign customers. Moreover, customer relationship and the whole selling process should also be adjusted to the foreign market and its cultural habits. Hence, cultural differences need to be understood and taken into consideration. The role of international teams is in that case crucial to complete the core competences of the organisations and bring multicultural competences and understanding.

Cultural diversity should be entirely recognised, accepted and understood within multicultural teams to have the opportunity to fully realise their potential. International teams have a lot of potential to benefit from as soon as the team turns its cultural diversity and differences into advantages. The performance of international teams is a

concern for MNCs as it affects their ways to compete in international markets and serve foreign customers.

Working in an international team can be challenging and even stressful especially when there is a tight schedule to respect and also when some team members are based in foreign locations. However, being part of such team is real enrichment that contributes to personal development of individuals. Hence, multicultural teams are clearly characterised by ambivalence. A same element that qualifies them can be both considered as positive and negative. For instance, different ways of thinking are seen as a source of enrichment and also at the same time as a source of misunderstandings and tensions. This ambivalence probably explains why multicultural teams have the possibility to become the least or the most effective in MNCs, compared to single-cultural teams (Davison & Ward 1999: 20), depending on how cultural diversity is managed.

5.3. Contributions of the study

This study enables to better understand the impact of cultural diversity on team performance and the necessary conditions to achieve high performance in multicultural teams. The empirical findings confirm previous findings, theories and concepts concerning the benefits and disadvantages of cultural diversity as well as the main factors of performance in those teams. It was amazing to see how the findings correspond well to the literature and the conceptual framework of analysis.

International teams have to be managed differently than national ones as cultural diversity can either represent a drawback and slows down the teamwork or be turned to advantage and even becomes a source of performance and synergy. They are challenging to manage due to the ambivalence that characterises them and particular measures are necessary to take advantage of their benefits. This study provides a full

understanding of their dynamics and ways of functioning as well as the right conditions for them to be optimised and fully realise their potential.

The present study also put some light on the importance of previous international exposure for team members to raise cultural awareness and understanding. This topic has not been addressed by previous research with the same approach. Such exposure enables to be confronted to multiculturalism and its complexity. The presence of members with previous and successful international experiences facilitates the connectivity between the members of the team and the performance is improved. The study has demonstrated a clear relation between previous international experiences of team members and team performance.

5.4. Suggestions for further research

This research has focused on the team level and the point of view of team members. Some of the interviewees were team leaders, but it would be interesting to conduct a similar research, taking into account exclusively the company and management perspective. The comparison with the findings of this research would provide some additional insights on the topic.

The qualitative study could be supplemented by interviewing more managers working in international teams, especially from other continents. This research has mainly focused on European managers as they represent nine out of the twelve interviewees. Indeed, A Japanese, an American and a Moroccan are the only nationalities outside Europe represented in the study. Similarly, this study is exclusively qualitative and could be completed by a quantitative research. It would enable to confirm the present findings with a greater sample of respondents.

With the diversity of results concerning the performance of multicultural teams compared to single cultural ones, the interpretation made on this matter could be

approved and deepen by another research. This research could interview two distinct groups of respondents, one belonging to a low culturally diverse team and another to a high culturally diverse team. The comparison of the findings between these two groups could confirm the contextual importance for the performance of international teams.

Finally, three background variables were chosen to characterise the multicultural team in this study, the level of cultural diversity, the level of international experiences of team members and the type of task. The empirical research was based on them. It could be interesting to realise the same research with different background variables characterising multicultural teams. Other interesting variables to be tested are the age of the respondents, the length of service in the company, and the number of team members within the team.

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