The curious case of culture in international business:

An autoethnographic study

Frida Bergman

Master's thesis

English Philology

Faculty of Humanities

University of Oulu

Spring 2019

Abstract

The topic of this thesis is how culture and intercultural communication manifest themselves in today's business environments. This thesis reflects on the relevancy and accuracy of the prominent intercultural communication theories of Edward T. Hall (1989) and Geert Hofstede (1986; 2010) in the light of the personal experiences of individuals who are currently working in international business environments.

The theories of Hall and Hofstede are regarded by some as the key theories of intercultural communication, which is why these two were chosen as the specific theoretical focus for this thesis. The theories have since received some criticism for taking too many liberties in generalizing entire populations of people based on the perceived prominent aspects of different cultures (e.g. hierarchy of Japanese culture and individualism of American culture).

The research method used in this thesis is analytic autoethnography. This choice of research method not only influences the language used in this thesis but also the structure of the paper. The data of this thesis consists of the personal experiences of myself and three interviewees. These personal experiences are examined in the light of the theories of Hall and Hofstede in an attempt to discover how well the theories reflect the real-life experiences of people working in the business world, and to offer the reader insights into how culture manifests itself in business environments.

The data used in this thesis shows that while the theories can still be considered somewhat relevant in the intercultural business environments of today, the relevancy seems limited to very specific instances. Additionally, it seems that reliance on the theoretical framework for cultures which the theories provide may even hinder actual intercultural communication situations in the business world. The data also shows that other forms of culture – such as organization culture and profession culture – are perhaps more important than national culture in business contexts, something which the theories of Hall and Hofstede do not seem to address adequately.

This thesis does not definitively answer how intercultural communication should be addressed now or in the future. However, this thesis aims to provide the reader with ideas and insights into intercultural communication in real business environments.

Tiivistelmä

Tämän opinnäytteen aihe on, kuinka kulttuuri ja interkulttuurinen kommunikaatio ilmentyvät nykypäivän bisnesympäristöissä. Tässä opinnäytteessä tutkitaan, kuinka hyvin Edward T. Hallin (1989) ja Geert Hofsteden (1986; 2010) merkittävät teoriat interkulttuurisesta kommunikaatiosta vastaavat kansainvälisissä bisnesympäristöissä työskentelevien henkilöiden omia kokemuksia.

Aikaisemmassa aiheeseen liittyvässä kirjallisuudessa Hallin ja Hofsteden teorioita interkulttuurisesta kommunikaatiosta pidetään merkittävinä, minkä takia nämä kaksi teoriaa valittiin tämän opinnäytteen fokukseksi. Näitä teorioita on kritisoitu muun muassa siitä, että ne yleistävät liian vapaasti kokonaisia väestöryhmiä näennäisesti erilaisten kulttuuripiirteiden perusteella (esimerkiksi hierarkkisuus Japanissa ja individualismisuus Amerikassa).

Tässä opinnäytteessä käytetty tutkimusmetodi on analyyttinen autoetnografia. Tutkimusmetodin valinta on vaikuttanut tutkimuksessa sekä tutkimuksen kirjoitustyyliin että opinnäytteen rakenteeseen. Tutkimuksessa käytetty aineisto koostuu sekä tutkijan omista että kolmen haastateltavan henkilökohtaisista kokemuksista. Näitä henkilökohtaisia kokemuksia tarkastellaan Hallin ja Hofsteden teorioiden avulla. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka hyvin nämä teoriat vastaavat aineistossa ilmentyviä tosielämän henkilökohtaisia kokemuksia ja kuinka kulttuuri ilmentyy bisnesympäristöissä.

Aineistosta ilmenee, että vaikka teorioissa esiintyykin yhtäläisyyksiä todellisten henkilökohtaisten kokemuksien kanssa, teorioiden hyödyt rajoittuvat kuitenkin vain tietynlaisiin tilanteisiin. Lisäksi aineistosta ilmenee, että liiallinen tukeutuminen teorioissa esitettyihin kulttuurisiin raameihin voi jopa osoittautua haitalliseksi todellisissa interkulttuurisissa kommunikaatiotilanteissa. Aineistosta käy myös ilmi, että bisneskonteksteissa kulttuurin muut muodot, kuten organisaatiokulttuuri ja ammattikulttuuri, ovat mahdollisesti olennaisempia kuin kansalliskulttuuri, mitä Hallin ja Hofsteden teoriat eivät käsittele tarpeeksi kattavasti.

Tämä opinnäytetyö ei kykene vastaamaan siihen, kuinka interkulttuurista kommunikaatiota pitäisi käsitellä teoreettisesti nyt tai tulevaisuudessa. Työn tavoitteena on kuitenkin tarjota lukijalle ajatuksia ja näkemyksiä siitä, kuinka interkulttuurinen kommunikaatio toimii kansainvälisissä bisnesympäristöissä.

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Working in an international company myself I have experienced the communication challenges that seem to arise out of cultural differences many times. Navigating through the multitude of cultures that can be at play in a single communication instance can sometimes prove to be an intimidating challenge where mistakes can be costly. To further add to the challenge, my educational background is not in business or economics but rather humanities – and more specifically English philology. This educational background has given me tools to communicate comfortably in English – which is the lingua franca of the business world (Cotton & McGrath, 1985; Grzeszczyk, 2015; Harzing, Köster, & Magner, 2011; Jones & Alexander, 2000; Kankaanranta, 2008; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Lindgren, 2014; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005; Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007) – but it has not necessarily prepared me for all the challenges that come with intercultural business communication. Thus, in order to learn intercultural business communication skills, I have had to learn from experience as well as try to seek out previous research on the topic.

Intercultural communication as an area of research can be considered to be relatively new. The start of intercultural communication research – according to Mcdaniel, Samovar and Porter (2015; p. 6) – dates back to the Second World War, where establishing communication with allies became of crucial importance. Since then there have been a number of studies and theories that have been introduced to help us understand the key elements that are at play in intercultural communication, and how to manage these communication scenarios in the best way possible. Out of the many theories presented over the years, there a few that are cited continuously to this day (Schmidt et al., 2007), and they appear to have influenced the many theories that have since followed. However, some criticism over the most prominent theories has also emerged as the nature of business communication continues to evolve.

After familiarizing myself with the most prominent theories of intercultural communication, and reading previous research on the topic, I found myself feeling conflicted. Many theories and previous studies on the topic of communicating in an intercultural setting did not seem to accurately match the experiences I have had in working in an intercultural environment. This inconsistency between theory and my real-life experience was the spark that started my interest in writing a thesis on this topic. I started to consider the possibility that maybe the fast-paced evolution of the business world – and business communication – played a role in why theory did not seem to reflect my actual experiences. Since the world of business communication has evolved so much over the past years with technological advancements bringing people together at a single click of a mouse, theories would also likely have to rapidly evolve to accurately reflect the fast-paced communication that appears to be the trend in today's business communication. Or maybe I was just out of the loop because I do not have a background in business studies.

Hence, my goal for this thesis is to examine how well the theories about intercultural communication match the real-life intercultural communication scenarios in the business world of today. In other words, the research question I hope to find answers to in this thesis is "do theories about intercultural communication actually reflect communication models of the business world today".

I have chosen to approach this goal of mine from an autoethnographic perspective (Chang, 2008). The reason for why I have chosen this approach is because with autoethnography I am allowed to reflect and examine my own accumulated personal experiences of working in an intercultural environment for multiple years. This approach allows me to compare the real experiences I have had with the theories and previous literature on the topic – as well as the experiences of others in a similar milieu as myself, without completely relying on second-hand information from others.

It must be acknowledged that autoethnography as a method is considered somewhat controversial in the field of academic research, as using personal experiences as data is not welcomed by all academics (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). The objectivity of doing research where the data is at least partially constructed from the researcher's personal experience is questionable to some. However, I would argue that ultimately all research is subjective to some degree, and as long as the data does not solely rely on the experiences of the researcher there is academic validity in autoethnography. This point is further supported by Hofstede who has also pointed out that "there is no objectivity in the study of social reality" (1986, p. 15). To further avoid writing a purely subjective thesis that resembles an autobiography rather than an academic research paper, I have chosen to use analytic autoethnography as my specific method. The rules of using analytic autoethnography will help me to ensure that my thesis will not cross the boundary which would place my paper in the autobiography section but rather remain in the realm of academic research (Chang, 2008).

Although there has been increasing interest in researching intercultural communication since the dawn of the globalization era, I hope to bring new insight into this area of research by offering a personal perspective. The added value that autoethnographic research can bring to this topic lies in the unique insights that can come from it: as a researcher and as a member of the intercultural work community – as well as a novice in the field of business with a background in humanities – I hope to offer a new point of view to the discussion of theory versus real-life. In addition to having a background in humanities and working in an international business setting, I am also working in a company that deals with information technology – or IT for short. This field of business is definitely quite a far reach from my educational background, and yet I have found myself to have an important role in my work community. I have the opportunity to communicate with a variety of cultures that are considerably different from my own on a daily basis thanks to my somewhat unique position at work. I suspect that with my background in education and my experiences I can offer a unique perspective as to what it is to work in an intercultural setting and how does one manage to communicate effectively in such an environment, and more importantly where can one learn the skills necessary to manage different intercultural communication scenarios.

It should also be pointed out that because of my decision to use autoethnography the structure of my thesis will be somewhat different from the traditional structure of an academic research paper. Unlike in a more traditional academic paper, I will not have a separate analysis section as the intention of autoethnography is to discuss personal experiences (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). Whereas analysis in the form of reflection and triangulation will of course be made in this thesis as well, separating this into a section of its own is not practical, and would most likely only hinder the process of reflecting and triangulating.

Additionally, the reader may notice that the tone of the text is also somewhat different from what one might perceive as the traditional tone of an academic research paper. This is also a symptom of autoethnography (Chang, 2008). Because the purpose of autoethnography is to discuss personal experiences in an honest way, and reflect on the things that have been learned, there is more room to use language that some might consider as 'more colorful' than traditional academic text (Chang, 2008, p. 52).

The next section will cover some of the definitions of culture, the most prominent theories regarding intercultural communication as well as some criticism that has been made regarding these theories. The third section of this thesis will explain in-depth the method used in this paper. The fourth section will discuss the data that was gathered for this thesis. The fifth section covers the conclusions, and finally the sixth section contains the list of references used in this thesis.

2. Background information

Before I can move on to discussing the real-life experiences of working in an intercultural environment in the light of previously established theories of intercultural communication, it is necessary to first go through how culture is generally defined and what kind of theories exist. Thus, in this section of my thesis I will introduce and discuss some definition for culture and explain how the previously established theories view intercultural communication. I will also introduce some criticism that has been presented by other researchers regarding the most prominent theories.

2.1. Defining culture

Culture is undoubtedly a concept that is familiar to all – at least on some level. Some would argue that culture is what defines us as people, defines societies from one another (Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Beamer & Varner, 2001). And yet, culture remains a kind of an enigma. There are disagreeing arguments on how much culture influences the lives of individuals as well as groups. There is also a plethora of definitions that people have for what culture is and what it actually means (Beamer &

Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar, et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Many of these definitions emphasize similar aspects but to differing degrees of specificity. However, there is little disagreement over the fact that culture – whatever it is defined as – does indeed influence the behavior of groups and individuals on some level (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Jones & Alexander, 2000; Lindgren, 2014; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

One of the key aspects of life that is influenced by culture is the way that we communicate with others (Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Research generally agrees that culture influences the patterns of thinking and communicating that we have. These patterns are learned as we interact with other members of society, and continue to grow as we gain new experiences (Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Arguably, before the age of globalization most people were exposed to a very limited array of cultures – mainly the cultures that were prevalent in the society they lived in. However, after globalization started to gain speed and people started to have easier access to other societies, suddenly people were also facing a multitude of different cultures that were undoubtedly somewhat different from their own. These cultural differences have resulted in challenges in communicating among people from different cultural backgrounds (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Cotton & McGrath, 1985; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Jones & Alexander, 2000; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Lindgren, 2014; Nickerson, 2005; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Today globalization has come a long way and access to different cultures is only a click away. Perhaps the effects of globalization are most clearly observed in the world of business. Now more than ever businesses are functioning on an international scale, and communication between different branches, subsidiaries, partners, and companies all over the world is becoming the norm. As multiple researchers have stated communication is at the core of doing business successfully (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Cotton & McGrath, 1985; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Grzeszczyk, 2015; Harzing et al., 2011; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Jones & Alexander, 2000; Kankaanranta, 2008; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Moon, 1999; Nickerson, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Rosenbloom & Larsen, 2003; Schmidt et al., 2007; Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012; Virkkula-Räisänen, 2010). However, as mentioned earlier, cultural differences create challenges in communication, and this is true in the business world as well.

In order to discuss intercultural communication in the business world, it is necessary to first try to define what exactly is meant by "culture", and why we are talking about culture in the first place.

As stated earlier, there is little disagreement over the fact that culture does influence the behavior of all people on some level (Campbell et al., 1998; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Peltokorpi, 2010; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2010; Tagreed, 2012). As Edward T. Hall puts it: "culture is man's medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture" (1989, p. 16). Research argues that culture can influence our behavior in ways that we may not be overtly aware of (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007; Sigmar et al., 2012). We learn what people and the community – or society around us perceives as acceptable ways of thinking and communicating, and this in turn will influence the way we learn to think and communicate ourselves (Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015). This process is called *inculturation* or *enculturation*, and – as the name suggests – this process is connected to the culture of the society we are growing up in (Schmidt et al., 2007, p. 22).

Additionally, when we are trying to discuss communication of any kind, previous research argues that culture must also be discussed (Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015). This is because communication is always culturally bound (Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015). Not only are our ways of communicating culturally tied but research argues that language itself is so intertwined with culture that it cannot and should not be examined out of its cultural context (Samovar et al., 2015). Although, language specifically will not be at the focus of my thesis, the connection between language and culture cannot be entirely unmentioned. As Fong (2015, p. 221) argues: "...speakers from different cultures define reality or categorize experience in different ways. Achieving understanding across languages is dependent on common conceptual systems rather than on structural equivalences".

In other words, even if two people speak the same language – English for example – but come from two very different cultural backgrounds, mutual understanding is not guaranteed just because the two share a language. Cultural conceptions can change the way people perceive a message.

As an example of potential conflict between a shared language and different cultural backgrounds we can look at how a single culture perceives small talk. In some cultures, for example you might find yourself being greeted by shopkeepers saying "Hello! How are you?". Depending on where you are from and what type of communication norms you have learned, you may interpret this greeting as a prompt to answer the shopkeeper's question since failing to acknowledge the greeting and question would be considered rude. However, some people might interpret this greeting as only needing some minor form of counter-acknowledgement such as a nod, 'hello' – or maybe no acknowledgement at all, and this would be considered perfectly acceptable. In scenarios like the one above, it is culture that has taught us the acceptable ways of communicating. It must also be noted that what is considered acceptable or competent can change completely depending on where you come from (Samovar et al., 2015).

Kim (2015, p. 387) also argues: "...communication activities of encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal information lie at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation by serving as the essential mechanism that connects strangers and the host-society". In other words, when we try to understand cultures – particularly in the case of adapting to a new culture – understanding the language and the different ways people communicate messages becomes of crucial importance.

Now that the 'why' has been addressed, we can move on to the 'what'. Let's start by looking at different definitions that have been given to culture.

Finding an exact consensus for the definition of culture is not exactly an easy task. For example, Hofstede (1986) in his book "Culture's consequences: international differences in work related values" defines culture as follows: culture is "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (p.21). Another definition to culture is given by Collier (2015): "culture is what groups of people say and do and think and feel" (p. 53). These two definitions appear to approach culture from two rather different perspectives: one defines culture as something that separates groups of people and one as something that groups people together. Although, ultimately both definitions speak of the same thing – culture having a hand in controlling the behavior of individuals as well as groups – the tone of the two approaches differs. Some other researchers – such as Hall – define culture (and its influence) in a much more detail:

> [Culture] means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function (Hall 1989, p. 16-17).

It is difficult to say which definition of culture is the correct one – or is there a correct definition at all? However, as seen from the three definitions above, at their very core they all have similarities, and all describe one single thing in different ways.

In addition to there being some ambiguity in the definition of culture, there are also multiple levels to culture (Campbell et al., 1998; Hofstede, 1986; Schmidt et al., 2007). The different levels of culture are also subject to change in different ways (Campbell et al., 1998; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Schmidt et al., 2007). As Charles P. Campbell (1998) puts it: "Culture' is perhaps like a glacier – fluid and fast-moving where it contacts the air, but frozen and slow-moving at bottom, that is at the level [called] core culture or primary (PL) culture" (p. 35).

Schmidt et al. (2007, p. 22-23) describe national cultures to have three levels:

1. Technical level
2. Formal level
3. Informal level

The first level – the technical level – includes things like technology, arts and materialistic components. This level is also the most susceptible to change. The second level – the formal level – then contains thing like the norms, rules, traditions, rituals, customs and communication patterns. This level experiences change, but on a slower pace compared to the first level. The third and final level of culture – the informal level – contains the core values and beliefs of a culture as well as the cultural history. This final level is arguably very resistant to change and particularly any attempts of change imposed from outside influences (Campbell et al., 1998).

In this thesis when I speak of culture, I too, refer to the environmental and social element called 'culture' that influences the behavior of individuals and groups. For my thesis, particularly the first level of culture is not as relevant. However, the second and third level of culture are definitely of importance.

In addition to the above-mentioned definitions for what culture is in general, there are a few other secondary terms that are important in the context of my thesis:

- National culture
- International business culture
- Organization culture
- Profession culture

All these secondary terms at their core include the same definitions of culture as the ones discussed above in the sense that they too refer to different types of cultures that influence the behavior of individuals as well as groups. However, all these secondary terms mean slightly different things and have somewhat different demographics, and thus they need to be separated into their own categories.

2.1.1. National culture

National culture in the context of this thesis means the culture that is generally associated with a country. National culture thus refers to the values, norms, rituals, and so on that are associated with a specific country. The demographic of this subculture includes all people who were grew up in the country in question. Often national culture includes broad generalizations about the native people of the country (Campbell et al., 1998; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007; Tagreed, 2012). For example: Japanese culture is often associated with having a strong hierarchy and a collectivistic mindset. Finnish culture is sometimes associated with social awkwardness and reluctance to communicate with strangers.

I will return to the accuracy and relevancy of national culture in the context of intercultural business – as well as the stereotypes that are normally associated with this culture – later in the discussion.

2.1.2. International business culture

Business culture in the context of this paper refers to the general culture of the international business world as a whole. Business culture is often viewed as cut-throat and rather unforgiving as well as highly competitive (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Hall, 1989; Harzing et al., 2011; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Jones & Alexander, 2000; Kankaanranta, 2008; Kassim & Ali, 2010; Lindgren, 2014; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Moon, 1999; Nickerson, 2005; Peltokorpi, 2010; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Rosenbloom & Larsen, 2003;

Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2010; Tagreed, 2012; Virkkula-Räisänen, 2010). Business culture is also characterized well by a fast-pace: businesses can appear and disappear in what seems like a blink of an eye. Generally, business culture is centered around making a profit and the demographic includes all businesses and organizations involved in the global market.

2.1.3. Organization culture

Organization culture refers to the culture that exists inside a single organization. This can mean specific rituals, rules, norms and values that a single organization has (Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015). Organization culture usually encompasses the headquarters of the organization as well as all branches and subsidiaries. Organization culture can include things like the hierarchical system of the organization, system for reporting and business conduct guidelines set by the organization. The demographic of this culture includes all the employees of the organization.

2.1.4. Profession culture

Profession culture or professional culture in the context of this thesis refers to the culture that is generally associated with a line of profession. For example: sales or accounting culture. This specific subculture includes a massive array of its own subcultures, such as the sales and accounting mentioned before. These subcultures provide generalizations of different professions and people working in these professions.

For example: sales culture is normally regarded as highly competitive and people working in sales are generally viewed as extroverted. The image of a sales person may also include some negative connotations such as the desire to manipulate people to buy what they are selling. On the other hand, accounting culture is often associated with strict bureaucracy and little flexibility. People who work in accounting can be stereotyped to be nagging and inflexible, or more positively as being detail-oriented.

All these subcultures have an important role when we are discussing intercultural business communication as well as the already established theories. However, as will be discussed later, many theories put emphasis on national culture being a big culprit in determining how people in intercultural business settings act (Campbell et al., 1998; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Hall, 1989; Harzing et al., 2011; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Lindgren, 2014; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Peltokorpi, 2010; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2010; Tagreed, 2012; Virkkula-Räisänen, 2010). However, I find it important to point out that people can belong to more than just one culture, and thus the behavior of the person is likely to be influenced by more than one specific culture, such as their native culture. For example, I as a Finnish native can be considered to be a part of Finnish culture. However, as I work at an international company, I can also be considered to be a part of international business culture, the organization culture of my company as well as the profession culture of my specific job description.

I will return to the argument of people belonging to more than one single culture – and their behavior thus being influenced by multiple cultures rather than just one – later in the discussion.

2.2. Prominent theories – the founding pillars of intercultural communication research

As mentioned in the introduction there are a few specific theories on intercultural communication that are continuously cited in articles written about the topic. These theories can perhaps be considered to be the founding pillars of intercultural communication research (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Peltokorpi, 2010; Rosenbloom & Larsen, 2003; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2010; Tagreed, 2012). Because the theories written by Edward T. Hall and Geert Hofstede are considered to be so influential and significant in this area of research, I have chosen to discuss these two theories specifically in my thesis.

2.2.1. Hall's high-context and low-context cultures

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall is considered by some to be the very founding father of intercultural communication research (Rogers, Hart, & Miike, 2002). Specifically, his theory about High-context and Low-context cultures became extremely well-known and of great significance in this field of research (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Hall, 1989; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Rogers et al., 2002; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2010). The theory of High-context and Low-context cultures allows us to place the different national cultures of this world onto a spectrum where at one end is the High-context and at the other Low-context. The purpose of this theory is to help us understand the "basic differences in communication style and cultural issues" (Nishimura, Nevgi, & Tella, 2008) between different national cultures. Naturally, the cultures at the very ends of the spectrum represent cultures that are very different from the cultures at the other end of the spectrum (Hall, 1989). The '*context*' in this theory refers to the directness or indirectness in communication that is common in the national culture being discussed (Hall, 1989).

2.2.1.1. High-context cultures

High-context cultures are cultures where communication is markedly indirect and mutual understanding heavily relies on the context of the communication event (Hall, 1989). Nonverbal communication and implicitness are common, and they are very important elements in communication events (Hall, 1989; Irimiaş, 2011; Nishimura et al., 2008; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007) .This kind of communication pattern means that in high-context cultures the burden of understanding a message is on the recipient of the message (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Hall, 1989; Schmidt et al., 2007). To put it in other words; the messenger relies on the recipient of the message to understand the meaning of their message based on the context of the communication as well as the nonverbal and indirect cues used in communicating the message. The recipient is expected to know when and how to "read between the lines" of what is being said.

To further illustrate this, let us examine a situation where two people enter a house in the middle of the night. One of the people entering the house – person A – comments as follows: "Wow it's dark! I can barely see my own two feet!" In high-context cultures the other person – person B – will likely turn on the lights upon hearing this, although they have not been explicitly told to do so.

Although this is a rather simplified example, it shows the basic elements of high-context culture communication. In high-context communication when person A comments on the darkness of the house this comment acts as an indirect request for the lights to be turned on. Person B understands the implications of the comment made by person A and turns on the lights without being explicitly told to do so. In this case, person B interprets person A's message in the context of the communication – a darkened house – and proceeds to act according to his interpretation of person A's message.

The indirectness of high-context culture also has influence beyond just singular communication events (Hall, 1989). High-context cultures are also usually group-oriented, meaning that an individual's identity is usually associated with a group, and the interests of a group are usually prioritized over the interests of a single individual (Campbell et al., 1998; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Since an individual's identity is associated with a group, groups can face the possibility of being labelled according to the behavior of a single individual. Additionally, also fitting with the group-orientation, in high-context cultures relationships are usually build slowly and maintaining relationships is considered to be of high importance (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). In the business world this can mean that sometimes building a good relationship takes priority over succeeding in a project (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Authority relationships in High-context cultures are often vertical hierarchies and questioning people of higher status is not a common practice (Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al, 2007. The same also applies to learning: learning is perceived to happen through memorizing and listening to the authority giving the information rather than asking questions (Beamer & Varner, 2001).

Hall (1989, p. 17-18) has also argued that the way time is understood in high-context cultures is different from how it is understood in low-context cultures. Supposedly, in high-context cultures time is not as strict of a measurement as it is in low-context cultures. According to Hall (1989, p. 17) in high-context cultures time is 'polychronic' (P-time system) meaning that there is less dependency on schedules and multiple things are happening at the same time. In P-time systems, the current moment is given a lot of significance, and history may be considered to be of more importance than the future (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Hall, 1989; Nishimura et al., 2008).

> P-time systems are characterized by several things happening at once. [P-time systems] stress involvement of people and the completion of transactions rather than adherence to preset schedules. P-time is treated as much less tangible than M-time. P-time is apt to be considered a point rather than a ribbon or a road, and that point is sacred (Hall, 1989, p. 17).

There are several countries that are generally considered to belong to this high-context end of the spectrum, and these countries are not located on just one continent. Countries such as Japan, China, Arab countries and Latin America are usually considered to have high-context cultures (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007), with Japan being one of the most frequently used examples of a high-context culture.

In the context of my thesis the prominent use of Japan as an example of a high-context culture is highly relevant. Not only is this relevant due to the fact that the company that I work for originates from Japan, but also because I have specifically searched for a Japanese colleague to interview for this thesis in order to hear about their intercultural communication experiences. I will return to discussing these experiences further in the discussion.

2.2.1.2. Low-context cultures

Opposite to the high-context cultures where indirectness in communication is commonplace, in low-context cultures directness takes precedent (Hall, 1989; Nishimura et al., 2008; Samovar et al., 2015). Unlike high-context communication, low-context communication is direct and does not rely as much on implicitness or nonverbal communication (Hall, 1989; Nishimura et al., 2008; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). The burden of mutual understanding is on the messenger as opposed to the recipient as in high-context communication (Hall, 1989; Nishimura et al., 2008; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). In other words, the messenger must word their message in a way that clearly states what they intend to convey to the other person. The recipient does not need to expect the message received to mean anything other than what was directly stated, and the recipient does not need to "read between the lines" of what is being said.

If we return to the simplified example of the darkened house given above, the interaction may be somewhat different from that of the high-context interaction. In a low-context communication scenario such as the one above, person B might simply reply to the comment made by person A but not necessarily act upon the comment, since the comment made by person A did not directly mention turning on a light. If person A had said "Wow it's dark! I can barely see my own two feet! Could you turn on the light?" instead, person B would be more likely to act upon this received message since the desire of person A to have the lights turned on was made clear and not left up-to interpretation.

Also unlike in high-context cultures, in low-context cultures an individual's identity is associated with the individual themselves rather than a group (Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). This also means that even when an individual does belong to a group, the behavior of the individual does not necessarily label the group in the same way as it could in high-context cultures. The goals and aspirations of an individual are at the forefront, and the work that an individual will put towards achieving their goals is applauded (Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Additionally, building lasting relationships as not considered as important as it is in high-context cultures. The focus of low-context cultures is more goal-oriented rather than relationship-driven (Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Also different to high-context cultures is the attitude towards authority: in low-context culture hierarchy is not as vertical as it is in high-context cultures but rather more horizontal (Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Authority can be questioned if a person feels they have sufficient reason to do so. Again, unlike in high-context cultures, learning is perceived to consist of first consuming information and then questioning the information received (Beamer & Varner, 2001).

According to Hall (1989, p. 17) low-context cultures subscribe to the M-time system where time is seen as 'monochronic'. Monochronic time is much more schedule oriented and time is given a high value (Hall, 1989; Nishimura et al., 2008; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). As Hall (1989, p. 17) puts it: "M-time emphasizes schedules, segmentation, and promptness". In M-time systems time can be viewed as more like a road where one can see – or at least try to see – what is ahead of them. This also means that low-context cultures tend to not give specific moments or history as much importance as is given in high-context cultures and preparing for the future takes precedence (Hall, 1989; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Once again, there are several countries that are generally considered to be at this low-context end of the spectrum, and these countries are not specific to a single continent just like with the high-context cultures. Countries such as Germany, Norway, Sweden, Australia and the United States of America are considered to have low-context cultures (Hall, 1989; Nishimura et al., 2008; Samovar et al., 2015), with America being one of the most frequently used examples.

Here, similarly to the above section 2.2.1.1, I want to highlight that the frequency at which the U.S. or “America” is being referred to as having a low-context culture is also relevant to my thesis. Although the company I work for originates from Japan, we also do have a subsidiary located in the U.S. Additionally, one of the determining factors of how I chose my data is based on this phenomenon of the U.S. being characterized a certain way in theories of intercultural communication, namely as having a certain type of culture. Again, I will return to discussing the characterization of theories versus the real-life experiences in the discussion.

2.2.2. Hofstede’s dimensions of culture

The second prominent theory of intercultural communication – dimensions of culture – was developed by social psychologist Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). The theory created by Hofstede is somewhat more complex than the theory of High-context and Low-context cultures developed by Hall – at least in the number of different categories the theory has. Hofstede developed six dimensions of culture that can be used to identify certain cultural features as well as the way in which business is conducted within a culture (Samovar et al., 2015). Initially there were only four dimensions in Hofstede’s theory, but Hofstede’s other studies prompted the creation of the two remaining dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). Somewhat similarly to Hall’s theory, in Hofstede’s theory a culture can be categorized to be low or high in a certain dimension. However, since Hofstede’s theory has a total of six different dimensions, a culture can be low in other dimensions but high others (Hofstede et al., 2010; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Thus, the best overall description of a culture can be summarized from looking at all of the six dimensions together.

2.2.2.1. Individualism – collectivism

The individualism – collectivism dimension is quite similar to the individual-orientation and group-orientation discussed in the High-context and Low-context theory. This dimension describes whether a culture is more individualistic or collectivistic (Hofstede, Geert, 1986). One again, in individualistic cultures an individual's identity is associated with the individual themselves, and in collectivistic cultures an individual's identity is associated with a group (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

In collectivistic cultures an individual putting all their efforts into achieving their own personal goals is often considered selfish (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). Acting on the behalf of one's individual goals can stain an individual's reputation within the community they belong to (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015). Collectivistic cultures often place value on the sacrifices an individual makes for the greater good the group (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986).

For example, in a business setting this collectivistic mindset can manifest as a company expecting their workers to sacrifice a great amount of their free-time for the sake of the company. These expectations can be in the form of the company expecting employees to be available 24 hours a day or working extremely long hours (Samovar et al., 2015). The expectations that the company places onto its employees can also be unofficial – as in they are not clearly stated in any company policies or guidelines. The employees in such collectivistic working cultures can be simply expected to know that this is what the company expects from them. Unwillingness to meet these unofficial expectations can even lead to negative consequences. However, if an employee diligently meets the expectations of the company, the employee can also expect the company to take care of them – for example with the promise of lifetime employment (Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). The saying "one for all and all for one" often describes collectivistic cultures very well.

In individualistic cultures, however, the saying "every man for himself" fits better. Individualistic cultures usually do not expect individuals to make great personal sacrifices for the good of a group (Samovar et al., 2015) – albeit making great personal sacrifices for the sake of others is not necessarily frowned upon either. However, people who continuously put the good of the group before themselves can be viewed as being pushovers, naïve or even weak. Striving to achieve personal goals is often applauded and encouraged (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015).

In individualistic business settings, the work culture can be somewhat more tumultuous in the sense that since people do not feel as much obligation towards a group – or a company – switching between jobs can happen much more frequently. Relationships – particularly in the business world – usually form on the basis of mutual benefit, and these relationships may also end as soon as the parties feel they are no longer benefitting from it (Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Asian cultures, particularly Chinese culture and Japanese culture are often used as examples of collectivism (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Many so-called "western" countries are considered to be individualistic, with the U.S. being a frequently used example of individualism (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

2.2.2.2. Power distance

The power distance dimension describes the attitude of a culture towards inequality and the use of power (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). It should be noted that this dimension is examined from the perspective of the individual over whom power is being exerted – or the so-called "follower" (Hofstede, et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). In other words, the power distance dimension examines how much followers – or people with little to no power – are willing to tolerate others using power over them and tolerate inequal power dynamics.

In high power distance cultures, there is typically a strong vertical hierarchy, and authority is usually highly respected (Hofstede, et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015). In high power distance cultures, you can be born into a position that you are expected to hold throughout your entire life and people are also often expected to be satisfied with the position they have (Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). The power distribution in such cultures is usually one-sided and the authority of the people holding power is not easily questioned (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

In low power distance cultures, power distribution is normally more horizontal, and inequalities are not as easily tolerated (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). In low power distance cultures questioning authority and the use of power by people in higher positions is usually considered to be acceptable. Any use of power is expected to have the appropriate justification, and when the justification appears to be lacking there can be consequences (Samovar et al., 2015). Also, in these low power distance cultures aiming to improve the position or situation you were born to tends to be viewed positively (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

According to Hofstede (1986, p. 63-108), countries like Russia, India and China are considered high on the power distance dimension. High on the power distance dimension are also countries with dictatorships such as North Korea. Countries like the US, Norway, Sweden and Finland are considered to be low power distance countries (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986).

However, Hofstede also notes that in business power distances are necessary and always part of the equation (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). Even in countries where power distances are considered to be short, businesses will always have power distances – although the distance may not be as great as in other countries. A business will always need to have leaders and those who follow.

In low power distance businesses business decisions can be made somewhat more democratically than in high power distance businesses, with all employees being given the opportunity to voice their opinions and suggestions (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). In high power distance businesses decision are often made by the higher-ups without first going through all relevant employees for their opinions on the matter (Campbell et al., 1998; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Also, in low power distance businesses superiors are often considered to be a part of the ‘team’ and relatively approachable by all employees (Samovar et al., 2015). On the other hand, in high power distance businesses superiors are often considered to be somewhat unapproachable and they are not as easily viewed as team members (Samovar et al., 2015).

2.2.2.3. Uncertainty avoidance

The uncertainty avoidance dimension can be used to examine how well a culture tolerates uncertainty (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Uncertainties – especially in the business world – cannot be entirely avoided, and Hofstede (1986, p. 114) has noted that what matters is how uncertainties are perceived rather than the amount of uncertainties that there are. According to Hofstede (1986), occupation and age influence people’s perception of uncertainty and how they approach it. Sex, however, does not (Hofstede, 1986, p. 110). Additionally, uncertainty avoidance is not necessarily a dimension that can be easily generalized based on the national average or company average. According to Hofstede (1986, p. 110), uncertainty avoidance “varies considerably among people in subsidiaries in different countries”. Hofstede (1986, p. 115-117) categorizes approaches to uncertainty in two ways: the rational and nonrational.

The rational approaches to uncertainties tend to be more long-term strategical plans (Hofstede, 1986). Minor uncertainties and unexpected occurrences are likely to be included in the long-term strategies, but the potential major uncertainties are at the focus in a rational approach (Hofstede, 1986).

To better illustrate how this dimension might manifest itself, I have made up an example. Let us examine a fictional company where a rational approach is taken towards uncertainties. The company has planned a big project with another company. The project is costly and there are risks involved if the project should fail. The company has made meticulous plans for the success of the project by planning schedules, deadlines, and chosen the employees best suited for the job. The company is aware that there is a human factor involved in the project, and this can cause uncertainties. The uncertainties arising from human factors can be for example unexpected sick leaves or delays in schedules. Since the company has a rational approach to uncertainties, they have taken these uncertainties into account, but no considerable resources have been allocated to solving them beforehand. However, the company has made some backup plans: they have another employee who can temporarily take on the tasks of the employee who is on the unexpected sick leave, and the first deadline that was set for the completion of certain tasks included a grace period in case something went wrong. Thanks to the long-term strategy, although the company might have had to make some changes to their original plan, they were also prepared to make the necessary adjustments should the need arise.

In a nonrational approach, there is less long-term preparedness (Hofstede, 1986). When long-term strategies are not made, minor uncertainties can turn into major issues. An unexpected sick leave of a key employee working in a project can grind the entirety of the project to a halt until the employee is able to return or a suitable substitute is quickly found. A small delay in deadlines can turn costly if no grace period was thought of in advance. In nonrational approaches only the pressing issues are dealt with (Hofstede, 1986).

In cultures where uncertainty avoidance is high, there are usually continuous and relentless efforts made to avoid any and all uncertainties at all possible costs (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). From a business standpoint this can translate to seemingly endless amounts of plans, strategies, and bureaucracy. The inability to be flexible is one of the potential – and considerable – downsides to high uncertainty avoidance (Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). A company, for example, may decline to participate in a project that harbors risks but could have the potential to considerably improve their business. Since uncertainty avoidance is so high, the potential risks outweigh the potential gains.

On the other hand, in low uncertainty avoidance cultures, risks and uncertainties are considered to be normal (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, , 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Particularly in business, risks are seen as an unavoidable part of trying to grow and improve. If uncertainty avoidance is low, a business can be more inclined to participate in risky endeavors. Making detailed strategies to combat any and all uncertainties is less frequent, and this can lead to a nonrational approach to uncertainties where only the pressing issues are being dealt with as they appear (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986). However, in low uncertainty avoidance cultures there is also arguably more room for flexibility and creativeness since there is much less bureaucracy that limits an individual. According to Hofstede (1986, p. 114) this kind of short-term approach to uncertainties is becoming more frequent and there is increased willingness to take risks.

2.2.2.4. Femininity – masculinity

The masculinity – femininity dimension is a very interesting dimension of culture, where certain cultural aspects are categorized to be either feminine or masculine. This dimension – according to Hofstede (1986, p. 176) – is based on the biological differences between men and women, with men being predominantly more assertive and women more nurturing. Hofstede has also said that men tend to be more focused on advancing their careers and earning more money whereas women tend to be more focused on interpersonal aspects, rendering service and taking care of their physical environment (1986, p. 176). Societies and cultures can also be categorized as feminine or masculine depending on the predominant values of the culture (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986).

> A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.
>
> A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 140).

Hofstede also suggests that businesses can be categorized to be either feminine or masculine (1986, p. 176). For example, traditional businesses where products are being traded are considered to be more masculine and tend to promote men (Hofstede, 1986). On the other hand, businesses that focus on serving and taking care of others – such as hospitals – are considered more feminine and promote women (Hofstede, 1986).

Countries such as Japan and China are considered to have masculine cultures, where gender roles are quite distinct (Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Countries such as Norway and Sweden represent the feminine cultures, where gender roles are not as distinct and there is more concern over quality of life rather than career advancement (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Rather unsurprisingly, this dimension is also considered to be quite controversial (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Samovar et al., 2015). Undoubtedly some will feel that labeling a culture masculine or feminine based on the above-mentioned characteristics is outdated and inaccurate. Hofstede also notes in his book 1986 “Culture’s consequences”, that there are some exceptions to the gender-divisions he has made, and things appear to be changing with feminist movements (p. 179). I would argue that feminist movements have certainly made progress since Hofstede constructed this dimension, and thus the dimension certainly feels somewhat controversial.

2.2.2.5. Long-term orientation

The dimension of long-term orientation – or long-term vs short-term dimension – is used to describe how cultures view time-related issues (Hofstede et al., 2010). To put it in somewhat simpler terms, this dimension describes whether a culture is more inclined to living for the future or living in the moment. This dimension also has some similarities with the M-time and P-time systems that were discussed in the High-context and Low-context theory earlier in sections 2.2.1.1 and 2.2.1.2.

The long-term and short-term orientations are described as follows:

> ...long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards—in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present—in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of "face," and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239).

Cultures with long-term orientation focus more on the future, and there is less focus on the present moment. This description sounds somewhat similar to Hall's explanation of the M-time system (Hall, 1989; Hofstede et al., 2010), although there appears to be rather significant differences between the two theories. These long-term cultures also tend to value "persistence (perseverance), thrift, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, and having a sense of shame" (Hofstede. et al., 2010, p. 236).

Cultures with short-term orientation on the other hand focus on living in the now rather than looking at the future. This description is also similar to the P-time system explained by Hall (Hall, 1989; Hofstede et al., 2010), but once again there seem to be rather significant differences between the two theories. These short-term cultures tend to value "reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts, respect for tradition, protecting one's "face", and personal steadiness and stability" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 237).

East-Asian countries such as China and Japan are considered to have cultures that lean towards long-term orientation, whereas countries like the U.S. and Australia have cultures that lean more towards short-term orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010).

As briefly mentioned above, it should be noted that although Hall's M-time and P-time system (1989), and this dimension have some similarities in the descriptions of the different time systems, there seems to be disagreement between the two theories. Particularly there seems to be a disagreement over the countries that the two different theories name belonging to a certain category.

2.2.2.6. Indulgence vs restraint

The last dimension, indulgence vs restraint, is relatively new from an academic research perspective (Hofstede et al., 2010). This dimension is used to describe a culture's attitude towards fulfilling the desires of society and of individuals (Hofstede et al., 2010). To put it in other words, this dimension describes whether a culture approves people seeking to fulfill their personal desires without restraint – or whether a culture imposes limitations to how freely people can seek to have their desires fulfilled. Hence, this dimension could also be said to measure how seeking happiness is perceived in a culture. Similarities can be drawn between this dimension and the so-called "tight vs loose culture" theory (Hofstede et al., 2010).

In the tight vs loose culture theory, the tight cultures represent cultures where the society has a clear set norms and rules (Gelfand et al., 2011; Schmidt et al., 2007). Additionally, the so-called "tight cultures" have little tolerance for behavior that deviates from these set rules and norms (Gelfand et al., 2011; Schmidt et al., 2007). On the other hand, in the so-called "loose cultures" the norms and rules are more ambiguous, and deviation from these rules and norms is not as harshly judged. Tight cultures are also sometimes referred to as "homogenic cultures", and loose cultures as "heterogenic cultures" (Schmidt et al., 2007, p. 23).

In the indulgent vs restraint dimension, the indulgent cultures are characterized as having "a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 281). The restraint cultures on the other hand "reflect a conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 281). Additionally, it should be noted that "the gratification of desires on the indulgence side refers to enjoying life and having fun, not to gratifying human desires in general" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 281).

Since the concept of this dimension can be somewhat difficult go grasp as is, Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 286) use the paradoxical situation of poor Filipinas being happier than the rich people of Hong Kong as an example of how this dimension works. This dimension attempts to explain how for example people living in relative poverty could possibly be happier than people with a seemingly abundance of wealth. The key to this paradox lies in how the Filipino culture is more indulgent than their Hong Kong counterpart (Hofstede et al., 2010). Since Hong Kong ranks high in restraint, presumably people there can feel that their life is under a proverbial microscope of sorts, where any deviant behavior or desires may be harshly judged by others, thus limiting their freedom. People identifying with a minority – such as sexual minorities – may have a particularly difficult experience in a culture that ranks high in restraint. Although the Philippines are not ranked very high in indulgence, there is still a more relax attitude towards seeking personal happiness (Hofstede et al., 2010).

As another example we could examine a fictional paradoxical situation of a wealthy Chinese man being much more unhappy than their relatively poor counterpart in Sweden. China is ranked high not only in restraint but also in masculinity (Hofstede et al., 2010), and traditional gender norms are still rather prevalent in China. These gender norms expect men to work and earn money, however, this particular Chinese man would prefer to be a stay-at-home father to his children. In the eyes of the society this would deviate from the norms and rules of the prevalent culture, and thus the man would likely have to face some opposition to seeking out his desire – even though the man would be wealthy enough to leave work and stay at home while living comfortably.

On the other hand, in Sweden where the culture is considered feminine, and ranks relatively high in indulgence (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986), a man deciding to be a stay-at-home father would not have to expect nearly the same amount of opposition. Thus, a young Swedish man – who is relatively poor compared to his Chinese counterpart – can make the choice of staying at home rather than working, even though this would mean that some compromises would have to be made in regards to living comfortably.

Although people generally consider being wealthy to also indicate a level of happiness, in this situation the fact that the Chinese man is wealthy has no bearings on his happiness. Although the Swedish man is relatively poor, and thus his living standards are not as high, he is still happier because the society is less likely to judge and restrain him from seeking out what he desires.

As already established, China is considered to have a culture of restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010). Additionally, most Asian and Eastern cultures are generally considered to have cultures that lean towards restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). On the other hand, Western cultures are generally considered to be cultures of indulgence. Particularly, the U.S., Canada and Australia are ranked high in indulgence (Hofstede. et al., 2010; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

2.3. Criticism of theories

Where there is smoke there is also fire, and where there are theories there are also criticisms of those theories. Naturally, the two theories discussed in section 2.2. are no exceptions to this rule. Although the two theories are generally regarded as being the most prominent (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007), and perhaps the most important theories related to the topic of intercultural communication, they are not without their faults (Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

It has been decades since both Hall and Hofstede developed their theories on intercultural communication, and since then the accuracy of the theories has been called into question by some (Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). Saint-Jacques (2015, p. 17) for example notes that the research that was done by Hofstede and Hall in order to develop these theories is old enough where accepting the conclusions made based on their research as accurate representations of the present day is questionable.

In regards to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Schmidt et al. (2007, p. 28) note that critics of this theory argue that Hofstede's "national culture descriptions are invalid and misleading because of flawed research assumptions and faulty methods". Saint-Jacques (2015, p. 17) also adds that the dimensions of culture developed by Hofstede "are too readily used to explain everything that occurs in a society". For example, with the individualistic – collectivistic dimension, Saint-Jacques (2015, p. 17) points out that people can in fact be both depending on the situation. In describing a culture using these kinds of broad dimensional values can make a culture look extremely homogenic, although the label may not accurately represent a good chunk of people living within a culture (Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

In addition, drawing conclusions regarding the nature of a culture based on the answers of a group of people – even if that group of people is very large – is not necessarily an accurate representation of the truth (Samovar et al., 2015). As pointed out by Saint-Jacques (2015, p. 17): "taking the mean of a group of individual scores does not make such variables into measurements of culture" and "expressed cultural values of many intercultural surveys and questionnaires are not necessarily the same as behaviors". In other words, even though people may report that Japanese culture for example values a hierarchical society, this may not accurately represent the reality of present-day Japan, although it may represent what people perceive to be a cultural norm in the country. This criticism will also appear within my data, as it seems that the generalizations made in the theories of Hall (1989) and Hofstede (1986; 2010) do not necessarily represent the experiences of individuals.

Many articles that discuss and refer to the theories by Hofstede and Hall now seem to include a small disclaimer of sorts. These 'disclaimers' note that although the theories are useful, they should be taken with a small grain of salt; the reader should also remember that people are individuals, and these individuals may not always represent a theory's version of what their culture supposedly is like (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

These disclaimers are very much necessary in the experience of myself and the participants of this study. In fact, these small disclaimers are maybe even a bit too small when we speak of real intercultural business situations. Rather than a small grain of salt, the theories should probably be read with a considerable helping of salt, enough to maybe even consider seeing a doctor about the health disadvantages of consuming too much sodium. The accuracy and relevancy of the most prominent theories seems a bit sketchy when examined by people currently working in international business, where intercultural communication is a daily occurrence. Beamer & Varner already pointed out back in 2001 (p. 11) that: “to be effective in a foreign business setting, you need to know certain things, but not necessarily everything, about that culture’s priorities, its members’ attitudes, and how they think people should behave”. I will return to discussing this issue in more detail in section 4 of this thesis.

3. Method – personal stories

In this section I will be diving deeper into my method of analytic autoethnography. I will try to explain the nature of the method, and how I will be applying it in my thesis. I will also explain in some detail what kind of data I have chosen to use.

The method – analytic autoethnography – was chosen based on my conflicting experiences in comparison with the theories written about intercultural communication. The theories appear to be written mostly from an outsider’s perspective – a perspective of someone looking at the intercultural communication happening in the business world from the outside. Hence, using analytic autoethnography I hope to shed light on the experiences of an insider.

As the name suggests analytic autoethnography falls under the umbrella of autoethnography, and the even broader umbrella of ethnography. However, as analytic autoethnography has somewhat unique characteristics it warrants a separation from the two umbrella terms (Anderson, 2006). In order to understand how exactly analytic autoethnography is different from the two umbrella terms, I will first explain what the two terms, ethnography and autoethnography, mean.

3.1. Ethnography

Firstly, ethnography is a rather broad term used to describe fields of studies where the research phenomenon is studied through people who are somehow a part of the phenomenon in question (Scollon R. & Scollon B. K., 2004; Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Virkkula-Räisänen, 2010). Generally, ethnographic research studies different cultures through the eyes of individuals within the culture in question (Chang, 2008). There is considerable variation in how ethnographic studies can be done. The key in ethnography, however, is that when a phenomenon is studied, it is studied by examining the participants of that phenomenon (Scollon R. & Scollon B. K., 2004; Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008).

In theory, then, ethnographic research could involve such studies where the researcher observes the members of a certain group, for example a tribe of people, and makes observations about the behavior of these tribe members. Based on these observations, and possibly other data, some findings are made and conclusions – to the extent that can be made – are drawn. For example, one ethnographic research study could involve a researcher observing the native peoples of Siberia. The researcher is interested in how the native peoples of Siberia blend their traditions with modern technology. In order to research the phenomenon, the researcher must actually go and observe the natives. However, in ethnography the researcher usually makes these observations purely from an outsider's perspective (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al. 2010). By observing the life of the native peoples of Siberia, the researcher can produce findings about how the people manage to blend their traditions with modern technology. Based on the study the researcher has made, they can now better understand the culture of the native peoples of Siberia.

This is a rather broad explanation of ethnography but for the purpose of this thesis this explanation will suffice as understanding the nature of ethnographic research will be enough to help understand what analytic autoethnography is.

3.2. Autoethnography

The second umbrella term mentioned above is autoethnography. This 'subcategory' of ethnography, as I choose to call it, has its own unique set of characteristics which allows for it to be differentiated from some other subcategories within ethnography. A key distinguishing feature of autoethnography is how the researcher's personal experiences are used as data (Anderson, 2006, p. 378; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010). As explained by Chang (2008, p. 49) "like ethnography, autoethnography pursues the ultimate goal of cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences".

In many other fields of research, the researcher takes a back role, and their experiences are largely downplayed or entirely left out (Anderson, 2006, p. 376; Chang, 2008, p. 45). This means that the researcher does not necessarily introduce their own experiences and feelings in the research itself – or reflect their findings with their personal experiences (Anderson, 2006, p. 376). In this sense, autoethnography is different; in autoethnography the researcher's experiences are highlighted and treated as valuable data of the phenomenon being studied (Chang, 2008). The researcher's experiences are compared for example with previous literature on the topic and other kinds of data that has also been gathered (Anderson, 2006, p. 378-379; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010). This comparison of the researcher's personal experiences with other kinds of data and previous literature results in so-called 'triangulation' that is considered important for giving autoethnographic research academic validity (Chang, 2008; p. 49). By using personal experiences as data, autoethnography tries to provide information regarding a phenomenon in an understandable and maybe even relatable way (Anderson, 2006, p. 379; Chang, 2008).

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, there is criticism of this kind of a research method which uses personal experiences as data (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010). When using personal experiences as a key feature of a study there is a considerable danger of the study turning more into an autobiography or a novel of sorts, which is not the intention of autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010). Additionally, if the research only uses the researcher's personal experiences as their data the findings do not hold a lot of ground when attempts are made to generalize or make statements about a phenomenon as a whole (Anderson, 2006, p. 383-388).

Chang (2008), however argues that autoethnography is just as valid as ethnography:

> To achieve [the] ethnographic intent, autoethnographers undergo the usual ethnographic research process of data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and report writing. They collect field data by means of participation, observation, interview, and document review; verify data by triangulating sources and contents from multiple origins; analyze and interpret data to decipher the cultural meanings of events, behaviors, and thoughts; and write ethnography. Like ethnographers, autoethnographers are expected to treat their autobiographical data with critical, analytical, and interpretive eyes to detect cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed, and told. At the end of a thorough self-examination in its cultural context, autoethnographers hope to gain a cultural understanding of self and others directly and indirectly connected to self (p. 49).

Although autoethnographic research may look somewhat different to other academic papers, the research method still follows the basic rules of data collection, analysis, triangulation and reflection. Perhaps it could be said that autoethnography is only different to other research methods in its tone and structure – the fundamental principles of academic research remain the same.

3.3. Analytic autoethnography

Due to the criticisms of autoethnography walking a tight rope between autobiography and academic research, Leon Anderson (2006) suggested guidelines for what he calls “analytic autoethnography”. In this approach to autoethnography Anderson attempts to help researchers avoid the pitfalls that are usually associated with this field of study by establishing five (5) “rules” or key features that one must follow in order to do analytic autoethnography properly (2006).

The five key features listed by Anderson (2006) are as follows:

(1) Complete member researcher status (CMR)

(2) Analytic reflexivity

(3) Narrative visibility of researcher’s self

(4) Dialogue with informants beyond the self

(5) Commitment to theoretical analysis

3.3.1. Complete member researcher status (CMR)

The first important key feature of analytic autoethnography is that the researcher is a complete member of the phenomenon they are studying (Anderson, 2006, p. 379). In the case of studying subcultures – or cultures of any kind – this would then mean that the researcher must be considered to be a member of that culture. Since I plan to use this approach in my study this naturally also means that I too need to be considered a complete member of the subject of my research.

I see this first requirement as being fulfilled as I have worked in an international company – from here on referred to by a made-up name “AzTech” – for over three years. My work consists mainly of communicating with other branch offices – especially with our company's European headquarters – regarding human resource management and accounting. I am considered a full member of the company I work for, and I have my own responsibilities and tasks I am expected to meet and accomplish as a member of the company.

With the 'inside' knowledge I have thanks to my status as a full member of the international business culture, organization culture and profession culture I aim to give examples of the real experiences I have had during these three years.

3.3.2. Analytic reflexivity

The second key feature, analytic reflexivity, can be summarized as the continued awareness that the researcher is constantly influenced by the setting or environment they are in, and that the setting or environment is also influenced by the researcher (Anderson, 2006, p. 382). For example, a researcher examining a tribe of people must be aware of the fact that their presence in the tribe will influence the tribe in some way, but also that the tribe will influence the researcher in some way. Thus, it is necessary to try and state as openly as possible the influences that both parties are subjected to (Anderson, 2006). In other words, the researcher should reflect on what sort of things they have learned, experienced or felt, and how they may have influenced their environment.

In regards to this second condition set by Anderson (2006), I can already say that my own background as an English philology major and the research I have done regarding intercultural communication has definitely influenced my work-life over the years. Additionally, work-life has clearly influenced my choices of research topics, and my understanding of different topics such as international business management. I will further discuss how this particular study has influenced me – as well as how I have possibly influenced my environment – in the discussion and conclusion.

3.3.3. Narrative visibility of researcher's self

The third key feature, narrative visibility, I feel is tied to the second feature: openness and clearly addressing the experiences the researcher has had in relation to the phenomenon under study. By the use of narrative visibility, the researcher openly addresses their experiences, feelings and how they have influenced their setting and how the setting has influenced them (Anderson, 2006, p. 384). This third feature, however, is where one of the pitfalls of analytic autoethnography lies; the text can become too self-centered if the researcher does not take the necessary steps to avoid this (Anderson, 2006, p. 385). When narrative visibility is used too much the text will tend to turn into something that more resembles an autobiography or a novel, which is not desirable in analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006, p. 385).

In my discussion I will be presenting some of my personal experiences and discussing my views on the situations I have encountered, thus fulfilling the third condition of analytic autoethnography. However, I will not be solely discussing my own personal experiences. I will also introduce the experiences of other individuals who have worked in environments that are similar to my own. This is done in order to avoid this thesis turning into an autobiography of my work-life. I will thus examine whether the experiences I have accumulated over the years differ from the experiences of others and the intercultural communication theories presented in previous literature.

3.3.4. Dialogue with informants beyond the self

The fourth key feature, dialogue with informants, is used to avoid the pitfall of the third feature (Anderson, 2006, p. 386). By having dialogue with other members of the phenomenon under study, the researcher can compare their own experiences with the experiences of others, and try to find similarities and differences between them. By doing this the researcher can hope to obtain a broader view and a better understanding of the subject, without basing their conclusions purely on their subjective feelings and experiences.

In order to fulfill this fourth condition of analytic autoethnography, I gathered interview data from three different interviewees. I selected three people who I wanted to interview based on the previous literature on the topic of intercultural communication: a person who had worked in Japan, a person who had worked in the U.S., and a person whose background was similar to mine.

I wanted to find people who had experience working abroad. The reason for wanting to interview such individuals was due to the simple fact that if a person had experience working abroad, I could rather comfortably assume that they had experienced multiple intercultural communication situations during their work. Although it is suggested by Samovar et al. (2015, p. 6) that individuals are likely to encounter intercultural communication events even though they only ever work domestically, I still did not feel comfortable assuming that a person who had only domestic work experience had encountered intercultural communication situations often enough to comment on how these situations play out on a regular basis.

The reason for wanting to find people who had worked in Japan and the U.S. specifically, was due to the amount of times these two countries were used as the polar opposite examples within previous literature. Hence, the interview data from people who have personally experienced working in these countries should be able to provide me with real examples of the arguably different work cultures the two countries have.

As for the third interview – the person with a similar background to my own – I wanted to have an interview with someone whose work experience was similar in length to mine. Additionally, due to my suspicion that age – or rather the generation a person belongs to – influences the communication habits of a person, I also wanted to find an interviewee who was similar in age to myself.

In regards to finding these three interviewees, I was lucky to find these people rather easily through my already established connections. All three were contacted roughly a month before the interviews took place, and the general gist of the thesis was explained to all beforehand. Luckily for me, I did not need to try to persuade my interviewees to participate or search for other options for participants, as all three were eager to help and support my thesis.

Before the interviews took place, the participants were first given a written consent form in compliance with the Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2009). The consent form included my contact information, an explanation of what kind of data would be collected, and the method of data collection (audio recorded interview). The consent form also informed the participants that the raw audio data that would be collected will be stored safely, and would only ever be accessed by myself so as to ensure that the anonymity of the interviewees will be protected. The audio data will be stored until the completion of this thesis, after which it will be destroyed. The transcripts of the interviews will be stored as long as they remain usable for future studies. The transcripts of the interviews have been anonymized.

The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw any portion of their recordings at any time. Additionally, the participants were given the opportunity to discuss any aspects of the consent form or data collection to ensure that the consent was given based on an informed decision to participate in this study.

English and Finnish were offered as options for the interview language, and the interviewee could decide which language they were more comfortable with. Additionally, with the Japanese participant, they were also given the opportunity to conduct the interview in Japanese – or revert to Japanese whenever the participant felt that they were unable to express themselves to a satisfactory level in English.

I gave all the interviewees the option to choose which language they were most comfortable with, due to the fact that I wanted to ensure that the interviewees would be able to express their thoughts and experiences without being hindered by a potential language barrier. For the sake of my thesis, being able to obtain the most truthful and accurate description of one's experiences and thoughts outweighed the downsides of myself then needing to translate the answers received. Additionally, it was agreed with the participants that the meaning behind their words was the most important thing, so in transcribing and translating the interviews, my focus should be on giving accurate portrayals of their thoughts rather than transcribing and translating every “umm”, “hmm”, repetition of words, and pauses of the actual interviews.

All the interviews took place between February and March 2019.

Ultimately, two of the three interviews were conducted in Finnish. The third interview was eventually decided to be conducted in Japanese, as there were concerns that the interviewee would not be able to articulate their spontaneous thoughts and recount their experiences as satisfactorily in English as they would in their native language of Japanese. The participant – after knowing me for over three years and having many conversations with me previous to this interview, in addition to having me work as a translator for him and his family on multiple occasions – felt confident enough in my Japanese skills to ask that the interview would be done in Japanese.

For the sake of transparency, I will also note that at the request of the Japanese participant roughly two weeks before the interview took place, I sent them a list of the potential questions I would be interested in asking. The list of questions I sent was in English – as at this point – we had not yet agreed that it would be better to conduct the interview in Japanese. I explained to the participant that the questions would be roughly what I am interested in discussing but in the actual interview the discussion would follow along the conversation rather than follow a list of questions, and that there would be spontaneous questions made based on the topics that arise during the interview.

It was also agreed with the participants that should I have any issues transcribing or translating their thoughts, I would ask them to check that my interpretation was accurate in their opinion. I also told the participants that before publishing this thesis, the participants would be given the opportunity to check what I had written should they wish to do so.

For the sake of readability, and in order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, I have opted to give all my interviewees fake names, as reading about the experiences of interviewee A, B and C can get rather confusing. The names have no relation whatsoever to the persons' real names and all connections to people with the same – or a similar name – are purely coincidental. Additionally, all company names have also been changed for the sake of anonymity, and the used company names have no correlation to potential existing companies whatsoever. However, background information such as the length of work experience, age range, nationality, and countries that the person has worked in – or worked in connection to – have not been changed as these facts will likely have impacted the experiences of the person. The consent form given to the participants prior to the start of the interview also notified the participants that these types of facts of their background would be discussed in the thesis.

Before I move on to explaining the backgrounds of my three interviewees, I will quickly explain the nature of the "other data" that I will be using in this thesis. The other data – my personal experiences of over three years – have accumulated naturally during my time working for AzTech. In other words, this "other data" will consist of my own stories of working in an international company, and the thoughts I have had regarding intercultural communication over these years. I would refer to the connection between my working life and this study as "opportunistic" according to the definition Anderson provides in his article (2004, p. 379). "Opportunistic" in this case meaning that I started working at AzTech and became a full member of it before I started my research on this topic. Thus, I can already at this point state that the work environment I belong to has influenced my choice of the topic for this thesis.

3.3.4.1. Interviewee # 1 – Tanaka

Tanaka is a Japanese native who has been living in Finland for a number of years with his family. Tanaka is a part of what I would refer to as "late Generation X" (people born between 1965 and 1980). By "late" I mean that Tanaka was born towards the end of this 1965-1980 time period.

Tanaka moved to Finland to work at a branch of IT Infinity (a made-up company name). Before moving to Finland, Tanaka already had accumulated over 10 years of experience working for IT Infinity – an international company that mainly operates in the field of information technology. IT Infinity originates from Japan, but the company has branched out into several different countries all over the world. Currently, IT Infinity's largest concentrations of branch offices are located in Asia and Europe.

Before starting work at IT Infinity, Tanaka had also worked in another international company that can be considered as rather similar to the company he currently works for. Tanaka explained that out of his over 20 years of work experience, he has always worked in a position where he has been in contact with foreigners to some degree. This contact has been in the form of developing products with partnering companies, making trips to other countries of business meetings and so on – all the way to his current position, where he manages a foreign branch office. According to Tanaka, the fact that in his work he has always been in contact with foreigners has probably influenced his views on intercultural communication.

When asked about his experience working abroad, Tanaka specifically mentions taking many business trips to India, Germany and the U.S. – where he actually stayed for two months. Of course, Finland receives a special mention as he currently lives there.

Tanaka is a software engineer by education, but at the time of writing this thesis Tanaka’s work consists mostly of acting as a director of IT Infinity’s Finnish branch. Within his work Tanaka travels all over the world to attend conferences and expos, visiting partners and other branches as well as the company HQ. Additionally, the work Tanaka does – and the position he is in – requires him to communicate with people of different nationalities and cultures daily. Just at the office he manages there are employees of three different nationalities and three different cultures. Due to the multitude of different native languages present at the branch office, Tanaka mainly uses English at work. Similarly, most of IT Infinity’s offices all over the world communicate with one another in English.

3.3.4.2. Interviewee #2 – Johannes

Johannes is a Finnish native who currently lives in Finland, but he has also lived abroad for a considerable amount of time due to his occupation. The U.S. is among the countries Johannes has lived in, and he lived there for two years. Johannes, like Tanaka, belongs to the Generation X. However, unlike Tanaka, I would consider Johannes to be a part of the "early Generation X", as he was born close to the year when I consider Generation X to have started (1965).

Johannes has a lengthy history for working at InsightTech (a made-up company name), totaling nearly 30 years. InsightTech is a Finnish IT company that has branched out all over the world, and Johannes has a managerial role for different projects at the company. For 25 of those nearly 30 years, Johannes has had intercultural experiences from working with customers, other partners, travelling and living abroad. During these years he has had time to see and experience the world quite a bit; spending time in India, Australia, Germany and the U.S. among other places. Similarly to Tanaka – as well as myself and Ellen (interviewee #3), Johannes uses a lot of English within his work, as only speaking Finnish will not get you very far when travelling abroad for business.

Johannes' work experience over all is quite comparable to the work experience of Tanaka, although Johannes has raked up more years when it comes to the length of his work experience.

3.3.4.3. Interviewee #3 – Ellen

Ellen is a Finnish native who has lived in Finland for the majority of her life, but she has also spent a considerable amount of time living abroad, specifically in Scotland. Ellen is a part of a generation that I refer to as "late Millennial" (people born between 1980-1995). Once again, "late" here refers to the fact that Ellen was born towards the end of the 1980-1995 period. Thus, Ellen is very similar in age to myself.

Ellen has worked for Superior Spectral (a made-up company name) for three years, and she started her work during her studies at a university in Scotland. Superior Spectral – like AzTech, Insight Tech and IT Infinity – operates on the international market and in the field of technology, albeit the genre of technology produced by Superior Spectral is slightly different to that of the other companies. Similar to Insight Tech, Superior Spectral is a Finnish born company. However, unlike the other companies, Superior Spectral is somewhat smaller, and does not have branches or subsidiaries in other countries. The company's history is also relatively short compared to the other companies as it was established much later than the others.

The overall length of Ellen's work experience – including her work at Superior Spectral – is very much comparable to my own accumulated work experience. The nature of Ellen's work at Superior Spectral, however, is not entirely comparable to mine, although we found that we had similar tasks in our work, such as proofreading and assisting. Ellen works as a test engineer. Most of her work consists of performing tests on the products the company produces, and communicating with other engineers of the company as well as clients and potential buyers. Ellen also trains buyers about the use of the company's products. Most of the clients and buyers of Superior Spectral are foreign companies. Superior Spectral also employs people of many different nationalities and cultures, and so the language that Ellen mostly uses in her work is English.

3.3.5. Commitment to theoretical analysis

The fifth and final key feature of analytic autoethnography, commitment to theoretical analysis, aims to provide the study substance beyond just saying "this is how things are" (Anderson, 2006, p. 387). Simply recounting what the personal experiences of the researcher and other informants has been, without doing any analysis of the data does not provide a lot of substance. By doing analysis of the data and comparing the data that has been gathered with the findings of previous literature – in this case intercultural communication research, the study holds more grounds in the field of academic research.

Thus, to keep my paper from being in a sense just a recounting of multiple different experiences of working in an international company, I will be comparing the experiences of myself and my interviewees and what previous literature has said in regards to the themes that arise from my data. Whereas I will not be able to make any absolute generalizations based on the data used in this paper, I will try to offer some insights into the reality of working in an international environment, and how much influence does 'culture' – as it is so often discussed in previous literature – actually have in the business world. My aim is to find out how well do the theories of intercultural communication actually reflect communication in the business world of today.

4. Discussion

Now that the most prominent theories of intercultural communication – as well as the logic behind my method have been discussed in some detail, I can get to the so-called "meat" of my thesis – discussing the real experiences of myself and others in light of these theories and previous literature.

To start this discussion, I would first like to set the scene of the start of my journey into the wild world of working at an international company. The point of this 'story' - if you will – is to help the reader understand why I think that the topic of theory versus real-life matters as much to me as it does.

4.1. The impostor syndrome

I never thought that I would be working an office job – never mind an office job at an IT company. And yet, during my second year of studying English philology at the faculty of humanities at Oulu University, I somehow found myself doing just that. My education and my past work experiences had little to nothing to do with IT, accounting, human resource management, or international business. Regardless, there I was, walking into a building full of engineers and sales people, completely gobsmacked that somehow I landed the job.

Albeit I did not have any training in accounting, human resource management or international business, what I did have was a couple experiences interacting with foreigners in a semi-official capacity (working as a student tutor for exchange students for a few weeks as well as being a language exchange partner for a semester), a relative fluency in English and conversational skills in Japanese. These qualities – experience interacting with foreigners and language skills (as well as a little luck with a dash of being at the right place at the right time) – were apparently what I needed in order for me to work at an international IT company. I myself was not entirely sure that these qualities were enough to actually qualify me for the job, but luckily my employer disagreed with my doubts. "There is a place in every company for someone with a background in humanities", I was told.

My image of working at a relatively big international company was less than rosy. I had formed the image based on the media portrayal of international business rather than any research or personal experience – although I must say intercultural communication theories have not exactly improved the image I had. I imagined such companies to have extremely competitive atmospheres and rather hostile environments, where one needed to have a background in business studies or otherwise have expertise in whatever field the company specialized in in order to survive. I am also pretty confident in saying that I am – or rather was – not the only one upholding that kind of an image – which I can now say is not entirely accurate, though I think there is a reason why the world of international business can seem intimidating.

For the first weeks of my job, I thought I was on an alien planet. Everything was new and I felt as though I did not know how to do anything on my own. I felt like I was thrown in the middle of a lake and told to swim ashore. I was convinced that I needed a business education in order to survive in this alien world of working at an international company, to make it to the shore alive. However, due to the somewhat challenging timing of starting to work while I was still at least three years away from finishing my studies, I did not really have time to look for any floating devices or boats that could get me to the safety of land. The only option I realistically had was just figuring things out as I went, and hoping I would not mess-up too badly while doing so. Luckily for me, my colleagues were willing to show me how to splash my feet and keep myself afloat.

Through my colleagues I began to see the outlines of what I needed to do. As I would imagine to be the case for most people when starting out in a new job, as soon as the nature of the tasks that you are expected to do becomes clearer, you start feeling a bit more comfortable with your work. The same phenomenon naturally happened to me as well, although I was still dreading the plethora of communication tasks I had – especially with our other branch offices. I did not know how to communicate in a business setting. Or at least I thought I did not.

In comprehensive school I had learned something about communicating “formally”, but those lessons proved to provide little to no confidence in a real scenario. I was basically sending emails to colleagues all over the world and hoping I would not land on a mine while doing it. Essentially, I tried to guess what sort of approach I should take when communicating based on the stereotypes I held about the countries I was communicating with as well as the stories told to me by my colleagues. The basics I learned from school, such as greetings and the kind of polite wording that does not appear in my native language of Finnish as often as it does in English for example, proved to be a shaky but doable foundation to start off from. Confidence, however, came later. Much later.

I vividly remember a day when I basically had all my doubts and lack of confidence further validated, and unintentionally put on display by unwitting outsiders as I participated in a recruitment event as a representative of AzTech. As I stood at our booth – nervous at the amount of people that could potentially approach me with hard hitting questions about the field of IT our company operated in (which I was entirely inept at explaining in great detail), a few people from my university approached the stand over the course of the day. “Wait, you’re working at AzTech? But aren’t you studying in the faculty of humanities?” one asked. Yes and yes. “How on Earth did you land a job like that? That’s crazy!” My shaky answer: “language skills, believe it or not”.

I know the intention of the comments was more than likely entirely positive. After all, at least among my peers, it is admittedly rare to see a person with a background in humanities working at a company such as AzTech. Regardless of the positive intentions of the comments, to me that moment felt like I was being exposed for being a fraud. I was experiencing the impostor syndrome. The line I was told – "there is a place in every company for someone with a background in humanities" – felt like a lie. I mean; how could a person like me, without a background in business studies – or engineering for that matter – work at an international IT company and claim to participate in intercultural communication events on a daily basis? And yet I did.

A good remedy for the crippling symptoms of the impostor syndrome (including anxiety and sleepless nights) were conversation with colleagues, friends, as well as the people I interviewed for this thesis. The resounding message I received was "when it comes to working at an international company and communicating interculturally, sure, you can read theories about it, but in reality, you need to experience it in order to learn it. Theories can only take you so far, but only the real experiences of communicating will actually teach you how to do it."

That is not to say that business education is not valuable or that I now think less of it – surely it can provide a more solid foundation for entering into the world of business. However, as Tanaka pointed out in his interview:

1. I think textbooks are often written by researchers or university professors. I'm not sure if those people have ever really worked in [international companies] and actually experienced that kind of work. So, I'm not sure how accurately textbooks written by people like that describe what reality is. I think people who work in such environments, like me and you, should be writing the textbooks and not someone who doesn't work in that environment.

When I eventually had the opportunity to get familiarized with intercultural communication theories, as mentioned in the introduction, I was left feeling confused – and frankly somewhat disgruntled. I wondered if the reason for my confusion was that I did not go to business school nor had I taken business classes. The theories, when compared with my own intercultural communication experiences, seemed to be outdated and inaccurate for an unignorable amount of times. I also took some issue with the examples that were quite readily given within the theories about how people in certain countries are – or at least we should be able to expect them to be according to the theories.

While reading the theories, in my mind I wondered how big of a backlash a person might receive if such statements were written today on social media sites like Twitter for example. Could you imagine someone saying "White Americans use words in excess" (Hall, 1998, p. 25) on Twitter today, and a statement like this not receiving backlash and the person behind the statement not losing any credibility?

Based on the instances I had witnessed of people making generalizations about large groups of people on Twitter, and then being essentially driven into hiding by hordes of people calling them out for it, I imagine the generalizations used in these theories would not necessarily receive a warm welcome today. At least on Twitter. In fact, I have seen cases where people have definitely damaged their reputation for making statements with generalizations that some might consider less damning than some of the generalizations made in the theories I have had the pleasure of reading. People have lost their jobs for generalizing large groups of people based on stereotypes – something that intercultural communication theories on the other hand seem to do with little resistance.

4.2. The cat is on the table

Now that the proverbial cat – stereotyping – is on the table, let's talk about it.

Stereotypes generally carry a negative association with them (Schmidt et al., 2007), and – at least based on my experience – generalizing people based on stereotypes is frowned upon. And as mentioned before – doing so can even lead to consequences. Regardless, we all seem to have some kinds of stereotypes about people, although we may not eagerly admit to the fact that we do. The stereotypes we have can be based on a number of things; nationality, gender, age, sexuality, religion, location, and others (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Hall, 1989; Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007).

Here is my understanding on how stereotypes work: based on the information we have about these "things" (e.g. religion), we tend to give the information different types of meanings, and then impose those meanings onto individuals that are associated with the "thing" in question. The information we have may also come from pretty much anywhere: our own first-hand experiences, things we have heard from friends, families, colleagues, or pretty much anywhere else. The information does not need to be accurate, and it certainly does not need to come from our own personal experiences.

Stereotypes can be negative or positive, although in my experience, negative stereotypes are discussed more often than the positive ones. Additionally, what can be seen as a negative stereotype to some can be a positive stereotype to others. For example, the stereotype of Finnish people being silent could be interpreted as Finnish people being rude and cold. Alternatively, the stereotype of Japanese people being extremely polite could be interpreted as Japanese people being focused on pleasing others and being indecisive. From how I see it, the interpretation of a stereotype as being either positive or negative depends on a person.

I too have stereotypes ingrained into my brain, and I too have acted with these stereotypes in mind, although I have really only realized this now that I am writing this thesis. It is difficult to pinpoint where exactly these stereotypes came from – likely they formed after being exposed to certain types of information over the course of my life. The information could have come from the environments I have lived in, the people I have met, and the different forms of media I already started to consume at a young age.

All of my interviewees seemed to have a similar experience when it comes to the formation of the stereotypes they hold. For example, when I asked Tanaka about stereotypes, he told me he did not really know where exactly he got them from. “Probably from Hollywood movies, media, hearing things from other people. It’s difficult to point exactly where”, he said. After all the interviews, I noted that the media seems to be a big culprit in the formation of stereotypes.

In summary, then, although the origins of the stereotypes we have may be ambiguous, the fact that we all have them is not as ambiguous. To me the generalizations we and the theories of intercultural communication make about cultures are simply stereotypes at their core.

4.3. Doesn’t matter who you are, it matters where you’re from – or does it?

So, everyone has stereotypes, but what are these stereotypes related to?

Well, cultures are very prone to being stereotyped, especially national cultures. When I think about the word ‘culture’, I often first think about a national culture of some kind, and aspects of that national culture. The first culture that comes to mind is Finnish culture – which probably makes sense as I am a Finn. When I think about Finnish culture, I think about silence, listening, humility, honesty, valuing free-time and family, among other things. To me, these are aspects of Finnish culture, and I doubt I am the only one who associates these kinds of things with Finnish culture.

In fact, Johannes similarly mentioned Finnish culture as valuing free-time, honesty, reliability, and that Finnish people are often viewed as shy and they are regarded as great listeners. Ellen also mentioned silence and reluctance to talk to strangers as being aspects of Finnish culture. When Tanaka spoke about Japanese culture, he mentioned politeness, collectivism and hierarchy as being some of the most notable elements of his native culture.

Some of the cultural aspects that were just listed are also reflected in the theories of Hall (1989) and Hofstede (1986; 2010). For example, Tanaka's mention of Japanese culture being hierarchical and collectivistic quite clearly fits with both the high-context culture description of Hall (1989), and Hofstede's collectivism and power distance dimensions (1986; 2010). Finnish culture valuing free-time on the other hand would fit well with Hofstede's femininity dimension (1986; 2010). There would appear to be some connection with the theories and how people today understand different cultures.

The cultural aspects that I, Johannes, Ellen and Tanaka associate with cultures – and the cultural aspects that are discussed in the theories of Hall and Hofstede – are simply stereotypes, in my opinion. Regardless of the fact that these are stereotypes, they are not necessarily all wrong or irrelevant. Clearly, I, Johannes, Ellen and Tanaka have similar views – or stereotypes – about cultures as the theories do.

So, to me it seems like the theories do hold some water. The theories must have gotten something right, as people still discuss national cultures in a similar way – using similar words to describe the different cultures of the world as the theories have done. To me, then, it would appear that national cultures have not changed enough to make the theories completely irrelevant or useless. At least not yet.

However, there is something important that I feel I need to address at this point: although I myself also first think about national culture when the word 'culture' is mentioned, that is not all that culture can refer to – as discussed in section 2.1. Something that stuck out to me like a sore thumb after reading many articles and books about intercultural communication theories was that nearly all of the theories focused on describing different national cultures.

If we go back the theories of Hall's high-context and low-context cultures (1989), or the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1986; 2010), these theories focus on describing the differences – and similarities on some level – of the many different national cultures that exist. The theories attempt to explain what kinds of values and norms people who live in these countries have, and what sort of influence these values and norms may have on the behavior of these people. If I had to draw any conclusions from these theories it would be that a person is defined by where they come from.

However, based on my experience of actually working at an international company for over three years, I would say the focus should maybe be on the other forms of culture that I would consider to be more prominent in business environments, namely organization culture and profession culture. These cultures – I feel – are barely touched upon in intercultural communication theories, although in my view these are the most important cultures at play in business settings. And it seems, I am not alone in this line of thinking.

As I discussed my honest frustration at the lack of mentions to organization culture and profession culture within the theories with Ellen, she noted that she understood why national cultures were being discussed but the lack of discussion about organization culture and profession culture seemed bizarre. The reason she thought it was bizarre – and I agree with her – is that for her national culture is a completely secondary thing in business interactions. To her, profession culture matters more than national culture – at least when it comes to work. Here is what she said about this:

2. When I would go on a business trip – and it was my first time going there but for my colleague it would be like the fifth time – on the way to the location the colleague would tell me what kinds of people I could expect to meet there. My colleague would tell me about the personalities of the people I would meet and what their background was. Like, they wouldn't tell me that 'these people are typical people form the Netherlands' – because that wouldn't mean anything to me. But the colleague would say stuff like 'this is a typical science guy, and pretty chill, and this specific guy is a bit flamboyant, you know, a marketing guy'. I too think about people more through their profession rather than their nationality. Because I think certain types of people go for certain types of jobs. Like certain types of people go for sales or marketing. Social and outgoing people go for jobs

> like that because that's what the job mostly is – being social and outgoing. Like you know that a sales guy needs to be social and have a strong liver. You won't see an introvert going for a job like that voluntarily – unless it's through some twists and turns. And I think at work it's more reasonable to group people by their profession rather than their nationality. It just makes more sense to me. Like it's different if I go have a meeting with sales people or engineers, but there isn't that big of a difference between the sales people of different countries.

Tanaka too recognized my frustration and agreed that although he considers national culture to be of importance in intercultural business communication, it should not be the only focus – nor even the main focus necessarily. When I then asked him what culture he thought was the most important culture to consider in intercultural business communication, he answered as follows: "I think organization culture is more important than national culture because most companies/organizations consist of international employees these days, and it is difficult to focus on a single national culture." To kind of put it in other words; businesses today employ people from many different cultures, and if we try to conduct intercultural communication within a business that has employees from all over the world, we would not be able to focus on the cultural backgrounds of each person. If we did, nothing would probably ever get done.

In order to further illustrate what Tanaka means, let's discuss a completely plausible scenario from AzTech, the company I work for. Let's imagine a fiscal budget and project planning meeting, where all of the staff from the office I work at is in attendance. In addition to the staff of our office, the meeting is also attended to by members of our subsidiary in the U.S. All and all, there are people from at least four or five different national cultural backgrounds in attendance. In this meeting we have to agree on important budgets and projects for the coming year. During the meeting, there is very little time for casual chitchatting, so other than exchanging a few words and greetings at the beginning of the meeting, the rest of the time is spent on trying to find a consensus for what the next fiscal years is going to look like.

When you sit at one of these meetings there is no difference in whether you are from Finland, Ethiopia, Japan or America – or any other country for that matter. What matters is what the company has envisioned for the future, and what each branch office or subsidiary will do to accomplish the goals that the company has set for that fiscal year. The highest priority in a meeting like this is in the company's policies. The next priority is the different branches and what is expected of them. The last priorities are with the teams inside a branch – like hardware engineers, software engineers, accountants, management, sales and so on – and the goals that are set for the individual employees. Realistically, in meetings like this there is no time to focus on what national background an employee comes from – the national culture of a person in a way loses meaning in these kinds of contexts.

In the fiscal budget and project planning meeting between our office and the subsidiary there may be some cultural differences at play. However, these cultural differences can mostly be credited to the different policies between a branch office and a subsidiary, rather than the geographical locations of the office and the subsidiary. A subsidiary, unlike a branch, can have its own systems for accounting, planning and scheduling. A branch on the other hand usually has to follow the business guidelines set by the company. The systems – or cultures, if you will – of the branches and subsidiaries can be somewhat different. And in the opinion of Tanaka, these kinds of organization cultures are what truly matter in business environments.

Johannes too prioritized organization culture above other forms of culture in international business contexts.

3. I think organization culture is surprisingly important. For example, at InsightTech, we are encouraged to improve ourselves constantly, to think for ourselves, to innovate, you can try different things and you can also make mistakes. Mistakes are okay if you just don't keep repeating them. But you won't get punished for making mistakes. InsightTech encourages you to do things differently. And I think maybe organization culture is the most important one.

To clarify what Johannes meant, he gave me an example:

4. America's work culture is a bit different to that of Finland. It's stricter and a bit tougher. You are expected to work longer days and section off your holidays. Like you can't just suddenly disappear for a month. It's okay to have like a week or two off and then another week off a little later. The clients also don't want us to stay off from work too long, they don't want to lose their contact. So, they kind of limit things a bit. And there's a bit more hierarchy: like the boss is kind of always the boss, more than it is here in Finland. Over here the boss is a bit more like a colleague, and they are more in a consultation type of a role. Whereas over there (the U.S.) the boss more like tells you exactly what to do. But of course, InsightTech changes things, because the culture of Insight Tech is a bit more standardized globally. So, if you go into a purely American company the culture is probably different than what it is at InsightTech.

So, regardless of the fact that Johannes worked in the U.S. the stereotypes that he considered to be applicable in the country did not really apply at Insight Tech, because the culture of Insight Tech took priority. Regardless of the fact that people working at the U.S. office of Insight Tech were American, their behavior at work was mandated by the organization culture rather than their national culture.

The approach of Johannes' response is a bit different to that of Tanaka or Ellen, so I asked him directly if national culture was important in his opinion when it comes to business contexts. "No not really, but I think it does influence the way people behave", he said. Regardless of the fact that national culture plays a part in how people behave in business contexts, Johannes still would not place priority on national culture when it comes to business interactions. According to him, the biggest influencer on how people behave and interact at work is organization culture.

4.4. Acting against your nature

Even though organization culture and profession culture may be the most relevant and important cultures at play in international business contexts, there is room to talk about national culture as well. As Johannes said – and as the theories are eager to point out (Beamer & Varner, 2001; Campbell et al., 1998; Cotton & McGrath, 1985; Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Grzeszczyk, 2015; Hall, 1989;

Harzing et al., 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1986; Irimiaş, 2011; Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006; Nishimura et al., 2008; Peltokorpi, 2010; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007) – national cultures surely influence the behavior of people in some ways.

For example, Johannes described German culture as being somewhat strict in time management, punctuality, doing things in a specific order, and just doing the things that are necessary. This description is also very similar to the image of German culture that can be concluded from Hofstede's dimensions of culture (1986 & 2010). Strict time management, punctuality, and doing things in a specific order would seem to fit with Hofstede's dimension of uncertainty avoidance as discussed in section 2.2.2.3. Based on this, it is then not all too surprising to see a person who has grown up in such a culture being punctual and very organized at work as well.

Additionally, Hall's theory would place Germany at the Low-context end of the spectrum as discussed in section 2.2.1.2. – meaning that in Hall's view German people tend to be rather straight forward in their words (Hall, 1989; Nishimura et al., 2008; Samovar et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2007). So, based on this, it would not be surprising to see a person who grew up in a low-context culture such as Germany, speaking in a straight forward manner that might appear even a little too frank from the point of view of someone coming from a high-context culture.

Although the organization culture and the profession culture may in a way restrict how much a person's national culture is in a sense allowed to influence their behavior in business environments, the influence of national culture can still be present. For example, a German employee may feel more anxious about keeping up with deadlines compared to their Latin American counterpart, if we are to go by the stereotypes presented in the theories of Hall (1989) and Hofstede (1986; 2010). Additionally, a German employee may present their thoughts at work in a straight forward manner that may appear too blunt for their high-context culture colleagues. However, the employee might have to be more flexible than their national culture would usually allow them to be because the culture of the organization demands it.

Johannes gave a good example of this in his interview:

5. When InsightTech merged with another company that was at that point already like a hundred years old, and really hierarchical, the merger kind of forced the other company to start being more flexible, because that was the policy of InsightTech. Like before the merger, in the other company the employees were really formal with one another. Two guys might have been sitting in the same room for 20 years working together but they would still refer to each other by their surnames and titles. Even though they knew each other's first names. But the merger kind of made them be more flexible.

In fact, I kind of saw the same thing happen at AzTech. When I first started to work at the company, I had to communicate with our German office on a daily basis. I would get emails starting with “Dear Mrs. Bergman” or “Dear Ms. Bergman”. Every time I read the email greeting, I shuddered at the level of formality I had not been exposed to before. It honestly made me very uncomfortable. At our office in Finland I was used to calling everyone by their first name and being by my first name, if not a nickname that my colleagues had kindly bestowed upon me. At our office it does not matter what position you hold: you get called by your first name if not a nickname. However, for my colleagues in Germany that was not the case.

Honestly, I have never been too good with using titles like Mrs. or Ms. correctly. First of all, I had no idea about the marital status of the employees I was communicating with, so I felt uncomfortable using titles that might be inaccurate. So, I circumvented this issue by just calling the employees by their first names. I would start my emails “Dear [first name]” and hoped that the responses I would receive would also refer to me by my first name. It took a while, but eventually the email greetings changed to “Dear Frida”. Just by being called by my first name made the email communications seem much less stressful.

My stress was further alleviated when I visited the office in Germany. During my visit the human resource department announced that they were adopting the policy of calling each other by their first names, since that was how most of the other branch offices were operating. The transitioning journey to calling each other by first names rather than surnames was a bit of a bumpy ride, and my German colleagues awkwardly laughed that calling the head of the European headquarters by their first name was still a too high of a hurdle.

After my visit the email communication has further changed into a much more relaxed format. Even emojis – which were completely out of the realm of possibility when I first started – are now acceptable and frequently used. Gone are the days of “Dear Mrs. Bergman”, and in are the days of “Good morning Frida!”. Gone, at least for the most part.

So, the organization policy in a sense made the German employees adopt a different way of speaking, although it first produced some awkwardness and feelings of discomfort. The point that I am trying to make here is that although company policy made the German employees act in a way that is perhaps outside of their national culture norms, the individuals themselves might have still felt somewhat uncomfortable about it, and thus their national culture influenced their process of adapting to this new policy.

4.5. The chances are 50-50

As much as there are people who fit with the stereotypes of their national culture, however, there are also those who do not. Although Johannes mentioned that he did not experience many surprises during his time in the U.S. when compared to the stereotypes he had about America, he too was not alien to encountering situations where the stereotypes of national culture he had were proven to be inaccurate. Tanaka also noted that the stereotypes he has have been accurate only about 50% of the time. The other 50% of the time the stereotypes he had were of no help whatsoever. And this is a point that I would like to highlight in regards to the theories of Hall and Hofstede.

As pointed out by Schmidt et al. (2007):

> Stereotypes can create expectations regarding how members of other groups will behave, and we will unconsciously try to confirm our expectations when we communicate with others and tend to process information that is consistent with our stereotypes. Stereotypes are often inaccurate, and they do not work well with individuals who have worked in international business or who have lived abroad because they will display increased differences from their national culture (p. 35).

The stereotypes we have of national cultures, such as the ones the theories of Hall and Hofstede connect with certain cultures, can surely help us understand certain situations.

For example, the stereotype of German people being frank and no-nonsense kind of people helped me digest the emails I received when I started at AzTech. From my point of view, the emails with no-nonsense, no well wishes, and so on made it appear as though I had managed to anger the German colleagues before I even started working at the company. However, internalizing the fact that in German culture the kind of email communication I was used to was not the norm helped me understand that no one was actually infuriated at me, it was just their way of communicating and I should not read too much into it.

Ellen too told me about a rather unpleasant experience, where knowledge about a national culture would have helped her with processing the situation:

6. It’s sometimes difficult at work when you encounter situations where you don’t know if a person’s behavior is related to their national culture or maybe their gender and their personality. So, for example, one of our distributors was from Brazil, and very often over the course of the two days he winked at me. And I have no idea if that’s just a thing that happens and is normal in the culture of Brazil. I don’t know if it’s just a casual thing to wink at people or was it more like from ‘a man to a woman – an older man to a very much younger woman’ - type of a situation or what. To me it was an uncomfortable situation because I didn’t know if I could bring the situation up as an issue to my boss like ‘hey, this person’s behaving this way – and of course because women are often told they are over

> reacting and bla bla blaa – but like in that situation it was really uncomfortable for me, because I didn't know if this was more serious in a way. Like is it as innocent as it could be thought of, you know, if it's a cultural thing. So, it was a really difficult situation, because I don't know if it's cultural or if it's a gender thing, or if the guy is just being inappropriate. And the situation kept me uncomfortable for the two days, because it was happening a lot. I didn't know how to react. I just had to kind of awkwardly smile. I eventually asked a colleague if they had experienced the same thing, but I can't recall what they answered. And now I kind of wish I had asked around more if this is a normal thing, like a stereotypical thing that happens in that culture.

On the other hand, there are also situations where stereotypes can definitely lead you astray and prove to be a hinderance in communication. The stereotypes we have – and the stereotypes that are presented in the theories of Hall and Hofstede – may be inaccurate, and give a different impression of a culture compared to individual realities.

For example, the way Johannes described the culture of America seemed to be quite different to the description of American culture that could be concluded from the descriptions of Hall's (1989) and Hofstede's theories (1986; 2010). As a keen reader may have noticed, in an earlier quote from the interview with Johannes (5.), he specifically mentioned hierarchy as being one of the aspects of American culture that is different to his native Finnish culture. Considering how the U.S. is named as a frequent example of a low-context culture, a low powder distance culture and high individualism culture – as discussed earlier in sections 2.2.1.2., 2.2.2.1 and 2.2.2.2. – I was highly intrigued by Johannes' mention of hierarchy. When I then asked him to place countries he had visited in the order of most to least hierarchy, he arranged the countries as follows: 1. Japan 2. America 3. India 4. Finland and 5. Australia. The order of the countries in Johannes' list was very surprising to me who had read so many articles saying that the U.S. is low on hierarchy. But now, Johannes was describing the U.S. as being one of the most hierarchical countries he had visited.

The examples of hierarchy in the U.S. that Johannes mentioned included things like "the boss is always the boss", how in American school the students need to address the teachers as "Miss" or "Mister", and sometimes even within families, children are expected to address their parents as

“Ma’am” or “Sir”. These examples do seem to reflect a more vertical system of hierarchy when compared to Finland for example.

Additionally, it was interesting to hear Johannes explain that in his experience people in the U.S. often belong to “cliques” and did not exactly mean what they said. Getting into a “clique” like this would require you to fulfill a certain condition, like going to a certain church or playing a certain sport. People in these cliques would be close to one another and look out for each other. According to Johannes, if you did not belong to one of these cliques, you might often hear empty invitations like “yeah, yeah we should go do this together” or “you should come there with us” but in reality, you are not expected to go. In fact, you are expected to understand that these are just words said out of courteousness. This would seem to somewhat contradict the high individualism and straightforwardness that are often cited as aspects of American culture – or at least this gives a somewhat different impression of the culture when compared with the theories of Hall and Hofstede.

When I spoke with Tanaka, he explained that while working in India he had learned that rather than focusing on the stereotypes of a country he should focus on the individual people in order to avoid making mistakes.

7. People from India - I don’t know if I should call it national culture or what but – people from India are very ‘*いい加減* [iikagen – irresponsible, careless], not sure how to say it in English, like they don’t really keep promises, or they kind of break them easily – that's the kind of image I think a lot of people [from Japan] have. Like ‘Indian people are really loose, really lazy’, and I thought so too. That’s how I originally thought, and so for example when working with Indian people I thought ‘since these people don’t keep promises, it’s better to try to manage work more carefully’. I would think like that at first, but that way of thinking started to disappear when I actually worked with them. Ultimately, I think rather than thinking about the stereotypes of the culture of India, I should think about the individuals. In India there are people who are very detail-oriented, and who work extremely hard, who keep their promises. There are a lot of people like that. Like nowadays the CEOs of really big companies, like Google and Microsoft, are from India, right? In India there are people who excel. But the population of India is

> massive, so there definitely are irresponsible and lazy people, and the stereotype has just been formed from people meeting those lazy people by coincidence. So, I try to avoid having such a bias as much as possible. Like, if I meet a Russian person, and I formerly had a bad image of Russians because of some hacking incidents and stuff like that, but that was ages ago and there definitely are a lot of good people in Russia. I try to look at the individual and not at the country they come from. I feel like if I don't do that I will make mistakes.

I also have encountered many situations where the stereotypes of national cultures – including the type of stereotypes or generalizations made in the theories of Hall (1989) and Hofstede (1986; 2010) – have been entirely unhelpful, and the situation was only further complicated by me assuming things based on stereotypes. For example, the stereotype of Japanese people being extremely conscious of hierarchy has not applied for many Japanese people I have met. I have managed to make situations more complicated than they should have been by assuming that the person I was talking to was paying great amount of attention to the difference in our position.

For example, I remember a situation where I was trying to bend over backwards in not overstepping the difference in position between myself and a Japanese colleague, making the conversation slow and awkward. I hesitated to voice my opinions even though I was aware of the fact that I probably had knowledge that the other person did not that might have influenced their opinion. I withheld my opinions as I thought I would insult my colleague by telling them they had misunderstood the situation when I was in an objectively much lower position hierarchy-wise. However, when the situation clearly started to tangle up in all the wrong places, I decided that it would be much worse for me to let the situation get more tangled than potentially my opinion being received as an insult. When I finally voiced my opinion, the colleague expressed that they were happy I told them of the issue, and that I should always voice my opinions without hesitation as my opinions were just as important as theirs. The situation became unnecessarily complicated because I was focusing too much on the cultural stereotype.

In my experience, the national culture related stereotypes I have had about people have more often than not been proven to be inaccurate. The patterns of behavior that have also been suggested in the theories – like the hierarchy-conscious behavior of Japanese people – have not been accurate. Thinking about it now, the point Schmidt et al. (2007, p. 35) made describes the thought process of myself – and probably many others – very accurately: when I have met people, I have often tried to make connections between their behavior and the stereotypes I have had about their country of origin. I have tried to validate the stereotypes before I eventually realized that there is no point in doing that.

4.6. Ice bergs are melting

As discussed in section 2.1. of this thesis, culture is often thought to have layers which are subject to change in different ways, much like ice bergs or glaciers as explained by Charles P. Campbell (1998, p. 35). The outer layers of culture – like the outer layers of ice bergs or glaciers – can change at a relatively rapid pace but the inner layers and the very core of culture – again like ice bergs and glaciers – are much more resistant to change.

I would argue, however, that much like the real ice bergs and glaciers of this planet have been hit by global warming, so have the glaciers and ice bergs of culture been hit with their own global warming. Albeit, it should be noted that the end of this cultural climate change will probably not lead to any extinction events for the mankind. On the contrary, the future of mankind may even benefit from this global warming of cultures. Things are beginning to change, and like with global warming, the changes are happening within a relatively short span of time. Although some may argue about the 'manmade' aspect of the actual climate change, when it comes to the climate change of culture there is little doubt about its manmade origins. People have created technologies that have essentially changed the game when it comes to communicating internationally.

As an example, let's discuss how the present day use of the internet is undoubtedly within another universe when compared with the early days of the internet. The internet is an entity that seemed to be barely mentioned in the theories. I would argue that the internet has brought about great changes that have influenced intercultural communication significantly. Even within my lifetime, the internet has developed at an unimaginable pace and completely transformed not only communication but also flow of information.

When I was a young child, using the internet was a relative luxury. The use of internet required time and co-operation from others within the same household – so no one would make the mistake of trying to make a phone call while the internet was being used because you could not do those two things at the same time. Downloading basically anything from the internet was a no-go as downloading a single relatively small file by today's standards might take hours if not days. Google did not exist until I was two years old and social media was not really a thing until I was a teenager – and even then, social media was a ghost of what it is today. Regardless, I belong to a generation that can be considered to have been born into the 'age of the internet' as the internet has existed all my life.

Speaking about how the internet works today and how it worked back in the 90s within the same sentence seems nearly blasphemous. If you had told me what the internet would be like today in the 90s, I would have probably called you a liar. And yet here we are: the internet is almost laughably easy to access 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The amount of information you can find on the internet seems infinite, and you can access it from your phone – and even make phone calls using the internet! Better yet, you can even make a video call. You can save files to a cloud – and then access that could from basically anywhere – provided you have internet access, which thanks to mobile networks now being a thing, you almost always have access to.

Gone are the days when you absolutely had to call someone to make arrangements to meet unless you wanted to physically walk to their door, knock and hope they would be home. Gone are the days when you had to physically stand next to a phone to make a call because the phone was connected to a wall by a cord. Gone are the days when you had to write letters and walk to a mailbox or a post office to send the letter if you wanted to write to someone far living far away. Gone are the days when you had to save a file to a memory card or a USB stick and hope you remembered to take the memory card with you.

Nowadays I can send a text message to a friend in Japan instantly from my mobile phone using an internet-based app for basically no cost whatsoever. I can create a document onto a cloud that multiple people are able to edit and work on at the same time. I can communicate with people all over the world in real-time using a number of different apps, websites, and services at little cost.

Now, there is a very particular reason for why I am using the transformation of the internet as an example of how the world of communication has changed, and the reason is that the internet is probably the biggest culprit for the change. Although the development of different technologies such as the mobile phone have undoubtedly been groundbreaking in changing how people communicate with one another, I would argue that the internet has had an even bigger impact. And, again, I do not seem to be alone in this line of thinking.

When I spoke with Ellen, Johannes and Tanaka, all mentioned the internet as having an instrumental role in the changes that the world of communication and culture have experienced over the last decade. Tanaka in particular pointed to the internet as having impacted his native culture in ways that he considered significant.

8. I think after the internet became what it is now people have started to change. Like, sometime ago, people and countries were pretty isolated. The incoming information was limited, so Indian people would become like the stereotypical people of India, and all Chinese people would be like Chinese people, all Japanese people would be like Japanese people. But now, because of the internet people from different countries have access to all kinds of information, so that system is starting to crumble. It's starting to crumble, and people are seeking out information that suits them. So, if you look at Japanese people today, they have become really Europeanized. Like there are a lot of Europeanized or Americanized Japanese people. Even though they have never really been to Europe or America. They become Europeanized or Americanized thanks to things like YouTube and stuff like that giving them information about those countries. In this age of the internet the walls of a country are starting to get lower and starting to disappear –

or so I feel. So, I think that if you judge a person by the country that they are from, you will make a lot of mistakes.

Tanaka also explained how the Japanese work model has started to change quite a bit just within the past 15 years:

9. Japan is a very hierarchical country – or it isn't really anymore but before there was a lot of hierarchy. For example, if a team member [at work] would make a mistake of some kind the boss would yell something like 'you idiot!' or things like that with a really loud voice and in front of everyone. That would be a normal thing to happen at a workplace in Japan. When you did that, of course, it would hurt the employee's pride and motivation would definitely be lowered, and you never want to make a mistake again. And that was normal in Japan, but it was something that you definitely could not do in other countries. Right now, the work model is starting to resemble Europe's work model more. So, you can't do stuff like that – what is called power harassment – anymore. There is a lot of commotion about that in Japan [that you can't power harass people at work anymore]. For example, a long time ago, when I started working, back in like 2003, that kind of power harassment was very prevalent still. I would see that often. But now it's not allowed anymore and the compliance rules [of Japanese companies] are much stricter. The work model is starting to become more friendly towards employees. Japan's work model is becoming more like Europe's or America's model.

Of course, to me, what Tanaka said sounded like there was a big change happening in the culture of Japan – as politeness and good manners are often considered very important in Japanese culture. So, naturally I had to ask him if he thought Japanese culture was going to disappear.

10. I don't know. I don't think Japanese culture is going to disappear in the next hundred or even two hundred years. But the borders of a country are going to start disappearing. But eventually, I don't know what being 'Japanese' would look like. Maybe it's kind of like the Saami people in Finland. Like the Saami people still exist in Finland and their culture still exists. But the scope of the culture has become smaller. I think that's what will happen [in Japan as well]. Japan was isolated until recently, but it's becoming more open now to other cultures. So, what is considered 'Japanese' is starting to kind of fade.

According to Tanaka not only is the Japanese work model starting to change, but there is also a worldwide standard starting to emerge for doing business:

11. I think a global standard is starting to emerge. For example, in the financial and accounting worlds there used to be a '*会計基準*' [kaikei kijun – standard accounting practice] specific to each country, like an accounting policy. But now there is a kind of an international standard for [accounting systems]. Similarly, in the way people work at an office and how teams behave, there is starting to be a global standard. And I think there should be global standard. In Europe especially there are a lot of refugees and Europe is becoming more global in a sense, becoming more international. So, if we don't establish a global standard, I think things will become very difficult.

When I then questioned Tanaka about whether he thought the changes he mentioned were a good or a bad thing, he replied that the changes were both for good and bad.

12. For example, Japanese people are considered to be very polite, but now there are a lot of impolite Japanese people. That's kind of what I mean when I say 'Americanized'. Like sitting on a fence by a road, eating a hamburger, throwing trash over your shoulder carelessly – that would be unimaginable in Japan before in my opinion. But there are definitely good and bad things. I think that kind of change is going to keep happening more and more. More cultures are starting to mix and become mixed.

Johannes also attributed changes in culture to the changes that the internet has brought to communication methods and flow of information. He also noted how, for example, the culture in India had undergone a seemingly drastic change within the last decade.

13. I think India is a great example of a country that has changed quite drastically, the country and the people have changed a lot. Like Indian people to me don't seem

> to be as humble as they were before, like now they admit to being able to do things and they have money, and they've been able to travel and so on. Like they aren't rude but they are more confident. And the same has probably happened with Finns as well but maybe it's just taken a longer time, so the change in India seems more drastic. I think India has changed a lot from when I first visited the country. Within 10 years there's been a massive change. Most Indian people are Hindu, and Hindus traditionally aren't supposed to place value on money and materialistic things, but I don't think the religion is as important now as it was, and people now openly aim to make money and kind of flaunt their wealth. I've heard some Indian people kind of say that since the culture there has changed so fast, they kind of miss the old days when life wasn't so busy, there wasn't that much traffic, not as much pollution, they didn't need to do long work hours and so on.

In summary, culture – in the opinion of Tanaka and Johannes – can definitely change. Even the third level of culture, the informal level as discussed in section 2.1., can undergo changes. Core values of a culture – like manners and politeness in Japanese culture or Hinduism in Indian culture – can start to melt away if the temperature is just right. Although the informal level of culture is said to be particularly resistant to change (Schmidt et al., 2007, p. 22-23), apparently the internet has changed the climate enough to even start melting the cores of these cultural glaciers.

4.7. Confused millennials

The interviews of Tanaka and Johannes were highly interesting to me as both of them belong to an older generation compared to myself and Ellen. Myself and Ellen are millennials and the internet – which seems to be at the root of many of the changes that different cultures have apparently undergone – has existed all our lives, albeit not in its present-day glory. We have not really been around to witness how cultures were before the internet touched down on them, and we – or at least I myself as a child – probably did not comprehend the changes that cultures were probably going through in our youth.

Additionally, as I said, Google did not exist until I was two, and admittedly my priorities during my childhood were more focused on playing than searching for information about other cultures. By the time my brain was developed enough to focus on something other than learning to do basic human things and independently search information, the internet had already developed considerably compared to when I was an infant. There was already so much more information and content available on the internet by the time I got around to using it regularly. Although I have witnessed the transformation of the internet, I have really only actively experienced the internet as a user after it had time to mature. For Johannes and Tanaka however, they were adults when the internet really started to become mainstream. They have already been in their late 30s and 40s when the internet really started to mature and become the force of nature it is today.

This difference in generation produced a somewhat interesting difference in views – at least from my perspective. When I spoke with Ellen about cultures and stereotypes, the discussion turned to what kind of a media world we had been born into:

> 14. If we compare what kind of media [you and I] have seen – like I don't even know how many how many tens of thousands of Korean series there are, and you see all types of Korean people in those series, just like you see all kinds of Finnish people, all kinds of American people. Just like there are all types of Korean people, there are also all types of other people. But maybe for the generation of our parents and the generations before them, the media only ever portrayed people from different countries as the stereotypical person of that country. So, a Spanish person was always like a maid or a gardener, Chinese people have always had a restaurant and poor English – the media has always been so stereotypical when [the older generations] have been young. But for us is it isn't like that anymore, because... it's racist as hell. But [media] has changed so much from their times, so there isn't as much typecasting as there was.

So, it seems that to myself and Ellen national cultures and stereotypes might appear in a somewhat different way than they appear to Tanaka and Johannes. To myself and Ellen, people have maybe not changed, just their portrayal has changed. We have not necessarily been exposed to as limited of an array in stereotypes about national cultures as maybe Johannes and Tanaka have been. For myself and Ellen, ever since we were of the age to comprehend concepts such as culture, we have had access to a variety of different sources for information, unlike Johannes and Tanaka had been in the past. For myself and Ellen we find it somewhat difficult to justifiably associate an individual with the stereotypes of the country they come from as – although we know what kinds of stereotypes there are about different countries thanks to the information that older generations have passed down to us – we have also been exposed to the fact that there are people who break those stereotypes more than I suspect older generations have been. To myself and Ellen, then, stereotypes related to national cultures hold less meaning than they might hold to those that have not had access to as many sources of information as we have.

Overall, it appears that not only are there somewhat different views on which cultures are the most important cultures in the actual world of business communication, but there also appears to be some differences in the way people understand stereotypes and their usefulness. Particularly in the case of national culture related stereotypes in business – unlike the theories – my interviewees as well as myself place little value on the national culture of a person when compared to the other forms of culture that appear in the business world (e.g. organization culture and profession culture). To myself and my interviewees these other cultures that exist in the business take priority.

5. Conclusion

Over the course of writing this thesis I feel like I have discovered new perspectives from which to look at culture in the world of business. When I first started to read the sources I have used for this thesis, I was confused and frustrated as I did not understand why the sources focused solely on discussing national cultures in relation to intercultural communication, and how this had any relevance in the business world. However, upon writing this thesis and speaking with my interviewees as well as doing some self-reflection, I now better understand why the theories of Hall and Hofstede are considered as instrumental as they are. The theories of Hall and Hofstede do give insights into the patterns of thinking and communicating that different national cultures of the world have.

If we then return to the research question I presented in the introduction of this thesis – do theories about intercultural communication actually reflect communication models of the business world today – the answer I arrived at, as unsatisfying as it may be, is yes and no. The theories, as mentioned in section 4.3., do appear to reflect our understanding of different cultures. Aspects of national cultures that both Hall (1989) and Hofstede (1986; 2010) present in their theories are still being referenced by people actively working in international business today. Hence, I would arrive to the conclusion that the theories cannot be entirely inaccurate or irrelevant.

Although, I would have probably actively denied acting upon any national culture related stereotypes before, I now – after reflecting on my own communication habits – cannot deny that national culture related stereotypes have influenced my ways of communicating. As mentioned in section 4.7., Ellen and myself take some issue with making assumptions about people based on their national culture stereotypes. However, now that I have had the opportunity to read more about intercultural communication theories and speak with Tanaka and Johannes, I have begun to see that – although I still would advice against relying on assumptions made based on national cultures – national culture stereotypes can indeed occasionally help us manage otherwise difficult communication situations.

In situations where communication has broken down or there have been misunderstandings, these issues have indeed sometimes been caused by differences in national culture. In these instances, knowledge about the different patterns of thinking and communicating of different national cultures can indeed help to resolve the situation – as for example this knowledge helped myself understand that my German colleagues were simply not accustomed to the level of informality that I was. However, as discussed above reliance on national culture stereotypes can also cause significant issues in communication – as they did for me when I was much too focused on the stereotype of Japanese people being very hierarchical.

In other words, the theories of Hall and Hofstede can sometimes help us understand difficult intercultural communication instances that we may occasionally face in business settings. However, to me it seems that these theories are truly valuable only in these select instances where the roots of the misunderstanding can clearly be traced to differences in national culture. I am purposely emphasizing “national culture” as, again, cultures come in many shapes and sizes. The theories of Hall and Hofstede may not be quite as helpful in resolving cultural differences between organization or profession cultures, which based on my experience and the experience of my interviewees seem to hold bigger roles in the business world of today.

In regards to my hypothesis that the communication habits of a person may be influenced by the generation they belong to (mentioned in section 3.3.4.), I was surprised to find that although the approaches that myself and Ellen have to stereotypes seems to be different to that of Tanaka and Johannes – our communication habits and experiences were largely similar. Although, due to the limited scope of the data used in this thesis I cannot argue that my understanding reflects how things actually are, I think that maybe the general attitude towards national culture stereotypes is somewhat different between different generations of people.

Also, in regards to how myself and Ellen place profession culture at the top in business settings, whereas Tanaka and Johannes say organization culture is number one – this difference may be due to difference in the length of work experience. Ellen and I have been involved in the world of business for a fraction of the time that Tanaka and Johannes have been, and thus it is possible that years later my response would more closely echo the answers of Tanaka and Johannes. However, only time will tell.

The world of business, and the world of intercultural communication have undergone major changes within the past decades. In addition to the changes that have already taken place, from my perspective it appears that the climate is not yet ready to settle down, and there are more changes in the horizon. It is possible that the changes will not cease until the cultural glaciers have melted entirely, but who knows how long that will take. The world of intercultural communication has surely changed from what it was back when Hall and Hofstede started their research and formed their theories. The world of communication will surely keep changing, and thus in my opinion the theories should keep evolving with the changes. The challenge of making the theories evolve with the rapid changes that are occurring in the world of business, however, cannot be understated.

Since we do not know when the climate will settle down – or if it will ever settle – it will be a challenge for researchers to keep up.

My thesis has not found comprehensive answers to how intercultural communication in the business world should be addressed now or in the future. However, I hope my thesis has been able to present the reader ideas and thoughts about how culture manifests itself in the world of business today, and how the prominent theories of intercultural communication can act like a double-edged sword. Hopefully, future research will be able to address the issues of cultural differences between organizations and professions more thoroughly.

References

Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 373-395. doi:10.1177/0891241605280449

Beamer, L., & Varner, I. I. (2001). *Intercultural communication in the global workplace* (2. ed ed.). Boston (Mass.): McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Campbell, C. P., Campbell, C. P., Dirven, R., Niemeier, S., Hall, E. T., Weiss, S. E., . . . Davis, K. (1998). *The cultural context in business communication*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. Walnut Creek (Calif.): Left Coast Press.

Cotton, D., & McGrath, A. (1985). *Terms of trade : Spoken english for international business* (Reprint ed.). London: Arnold.

Ellis, C., Adams, T., Bochner,A. (2010). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 12*(1) doi:10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589

Frey-Ridgway, S. (1997). The cultural dimension of international business. *Collection Building, 16*(1), 12-23. doi:10.1108/01604959710156925

Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L. H., Leslie, L. M., Lun, J., Lim, B. C., . . . & Duan, L. (2011). Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33-nation study. *Science, 332*(6033), 1100-1104.

Grzeszczyk, K. (2015). Language management in international business. implementation of strategies to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers. *World Scientific News, 7*, 136.

Hall, E. T. (1989). *Beyond culture* (Repr ed.). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Harzing, A., Köster, K., & Magner, U. (2011). Babel in business: The language barrier and its solutions in the HQ-subsidiary relationship. *Journal of world business*, *46*(3), 279-287.

Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G. Jan., Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations : Software of the mind.* Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. (1986). *Culture's consequences : International differencies in work-related values* (Abridged ed ed.). Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publ.

Irimiaş, E. (2011). Behavioural stereotypes in intercultural communication. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, 3*(2), 167-174.

Jokinen, K., & Wilcock, G. (2006). Contextual inferences in intercultural communication. *SKY Journal of Linguistics, 19*, 291-300.

Jones, L., & Alexander, R. (2000). *New international business english : Communication skills in english for business purposes. student's book* (Updated ed ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kankaanranta, A. (2008). Business English lingua franca in intercultural (business) communication. *Language at Work,* (4), 22.

Kassim, H., & Ali, F. (2010). English communicative events and skills needed at the workplace: Feedback from the industry. *English for Specific Purposes, 29*(3), 168-182. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.10.002

Lindgren, S. (2014). *Politeness in BELF communication: A study on directness strategies and formality in professional E-mail communication* (Bachelor's). Stockholm University.

Louhiala-Salminen, L., Charles, M., & Kankaanranta, A. (2005). English as a lingua franca in nordic corporate mergers: Two case companies. *English for specific purposes, 24*(4), 401-421. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.02.003

Moon, C. (1999). *Communicate with confidence : A compendium of communication skills for international business in english*. Helsinki: Yrityskirjat.

Nickerson, C. (2005). English as a lingua franca in international business contexts. *English for Specific Purposes, 24*(4), 367-380. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.02.001

Nishimura, S., Nevgi, A., & Tella, S. (2008). Communication style and cultural features in high/low context communication cultures: A case study of Finland, Japan and India. *Teoksessa A. Kallioniemi (Toim.), Uudistuva Ja Kehittyvä Ainedidaktiikka. Ainedidaktinen Symposiumi, 8*(2008), 783-796.

Peltokorpi, V. (2010). Intercultural communication in foreign subsidiaries: The influence of expatriates' language and cultural competencies. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 26*(2), 176-188. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2010.02.003

Rogers, E. M., Hart, W. B., & Miike, Y. (2002). Edward T. hall and the history of intercultural communication: The united states and japan. *Keio Communication Review,* (24), 3.

Rogerson-Revell, P. (2007). Using english for international business: A European case study. *English for specific purposes, 26*(1), 103-120.doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.12.004

Rosenbloom, B., & Larsen, T. (2003). Communication in international business-to-business marketing channels: Does culture matter? *Industrial Marketing Management, 32*(4) 309-315. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-8501(01)00202-4

Samovar, L. A., Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., McDaniel, E. R., & Roy, C. S. (2015). *Intercultural communication : A reader* (14th ed., 40th anniversary ed ed.). Boston (Mass.) ; Singapore: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Schmidt, W., Conaway, R., Easton, S., & Wardrope, W. (2007). *Communicating Globally: Intercultural Communication and International Business*. Thousand Oaks (Calif.): SAGE Publications, Inc.

Sigmar, L. S., Hynes, G. E., & Hill, K. L. (2012). Strategies for teaching social and emotional intelligence in business communication. *Business Communication Quarterly, 75*(3), 301-317.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2010). Intercultural competence and pragmatics research: Examining the interface through studies of intercultural business discourse. *Pragmatics Across Languages and Cultures, 7,* 189-216.

Tagreed, I. K. (2012). Cross-cultural differences in management. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 3*(6), 105.

Virkkula-Räisänen, T. (2010). Linguistic repertoires and semiotic resources in interaction: A finnish manager as a mediator in a multilingual meeting. *The Journal of Business Communication (1973), 47*(4), 505-531. doi:10.1177/0021943610377315