Delicate differences: professional encounters between Hungarians and German-speaking Europeans, and how to study them[*]

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Abstract

This study presented in this paper aimed to identify cultural differences between Hungarians and German-speaking Europeans (i.e. Austrians, Germans, Liechtensteiners and Swiss) that may cause conflict in intercultural encounters at the workplace. To this end, the authors carried out a qualitative analysis of 25 interviews with Hungarians and with citizens of the various German-speaking countries who work in Hungary. The qualitative results thus gained were subsequently re-tested by means of a quantitative survey. The authors were particularly concerned to arrive at unambiguous results by means of valid methods. For this reason, the present paper discusses not just the results of our study, but also the metatheoretical challenges faced by researchers into culture and cultural differences, and the means by which we endeavoured to deal with those challenges here.

1. Introduction

As intimated by its title, the present paper deals with a delicate topic: with cultural differences between Hungarians and German-speaking Europeans (i.e. Germans, Austrians, Swiss and Liechtensteiners; henceforth "GSEs"). These differences are "delicate" in that they are both subtle and potentially harmful in more than one respect. First, in managerial practice, a failure to recognize and deal with them properly may severely compromise working processes involving Hungarians and GSEs. Secondly, in the academic study of management (and, for that matter, in the social sciences in general), cultural differences pose various methodological and conceptual challenges to the inquirer who tries to capture, analyze and measure them – challenges that, if not given due attention, may seriously call empirical and theoretical results into question.

In accordance with this dual delicacy, we shall do two things in this paper. On the one hand, we shall present the results of an empirical study that aimed to identify the relevant cultural differences between Hungarians and GSEs working together in Hungary. We shall thereby add to the small corpus of empirical work on the specific cultural characteristics of GSEs and Hungarians and how they affect professional encounters. On the other hand, we shall discuss at length the abovementioned methodological and conceptual challenges that are generally faced by culture studies of this kind. In broad terms, this may be regarded as a contribution to the philosophy of the social sciences, or, in more narrow terms, to the metatheory of culture studies. These metatheoretical issues are of particular concern to the authors, for reasons we wish to explain at the outset.

Anyone engaged in scientific research wants to produce genuinely *scientific* statements about their subject matter (or should at least want to do so) – i.e., statements that can be *reproduced* and be used to make *predictions*. However, as we will elucidate in detail in section 2 (where our subject matter will be cultural traits and differences), making genuinely scientific statements in this context turns out to be exceedingly difficult. We suggest that these difficulties are linked to what might be called the "three inherent vices" of cultural and intercultural studies. The first of these is the classical *problem of induction*, which affects any kind of empirical research but is particularly acute when it comes to investigating culture. The second vice arises from the ways in which researchers set about discovering truths about culture: studies on culture by necessity proceed indirectly, by investigating communicative behaviour, situational preferences and the like.[1] Statements on culture thus become the result of more or less extensive *processes of interpretation* that are vulnerable to all sorts of arbitrariness. The third vice is largely a consequence of the other two and concerns the *degree of specificity* of (allegedly) scientific statements about culture: in order to be able to subsume as many individual observations as possible under just a small number of statements, researchers often formulate these statements so vaguely that they cannot qualify as genuinely scientific. At the other extreme, the statements can be too specific, capturing only one or a few cases, and thus they again fail to produce real scientific knowledge.

It goes without saying how eager we were to overcome these vices in our own study, and to produce genuinely scientific statements about cultural traits and differences by means of valid methods and in terms of clear concepts. We have tried to achieve this by a combined qualitative and quantitative approach. We first embarked on a qualitative analysis of 25 interviews with GSEs and Hungarians who had experience with intercultural encounters at the workplace. This re-

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1 In fact, the authors are not entirely sure whether there might not also be a way of investigating culture (as a mental object – cf. section 2) directly, by means of introspection, rather in the way Chomskyan linguistics investigates the syntax of natural language (cf. Chomsky 1986). For the time being, we prefer not to take too firm a position on this point.

sulted in three pairs of contrasting concepts that capture the relevant cultural differences between GSEs and Hungarians in a vague but very general way. We propose that, with regard to the pairs *objectivity vs proximity*, *initiative vs passiveness*, and *planning vs creativity*, GSEs tend towards the first, Hungarians towards the second member of each pair. At the same time, our analyses fill in the details of what these vague contrasts leave unspecified. Special focus is laid on apparent exceptions and contradictions, for which we strived to provide consistent explanations rather than tinkering around with ad-hoc theses or simply remaining silent on them, as culture studies all too often do. As a final step, we undertook to add robustness to our qualitative results by subjecting them to a recheck against a broader, quantitative survey among GSEs working in Hungary.

The design of our study is described in detail in section 4, and the results of its qualitative and quantitative parts in sections 5 and 6 respectively. First, however, we return to a more in-depth metatheoretical discussion in section 2. We begin this section with a clarification of the concept of culture – a helpful exercise for any researcher on culture, but one that is rarely undertaken seriously. Next, we illustrate the three inherent vices of culture studies with a number of examples from the classic literature, and we explain more exactly how we hoped to overcome them in our own study. We expand our consideration of previous research into a more comprehensive overview of relevant work in section 3, before presenting our own study in sections 4, 5 and 6. The concluding section provides a synopsis of the empirical insights won by our study, and evaluates them in the light of both the metatheoretical demands we place on them and the results of earlier studies.

2. Conceptual and methodological preliminaries

When engaging in research on culture (or, for that matter, in any kind of research), it pays to be thoroughly clear about the nature of one's research object. If we stop to consider how we talk and think about *culture*, most of us will likely conclude that culture is a *mental* thing: we conceive of it as something that is located in people's minds (or perhaps distributed across them) and that manifests itself in their thought and behaviour. Our tendency towards this kind of *mentalistic* conception of culture is also evident in that the term "mentality" is often used synonymously with "culture" in both everyday language and technical jargon. Both these terms refer to *typical psychological properties* by which members of specific, geographically or socially defined groups of humans (nations, populations, subcultures, classes, etc.) distinguish themselves from others. Where researchers on culture actually think and write about the matter, they usually adopt this kind of mentalistic concept of it. Hofstede (2011: 3) is an example, whose "shorthand definition" of culture takes it to be "the collective pro-

gramming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another".

Is an alternative conception of culture at all possible? One that is sometimes implicitly present in culture studies is to understand culture not as a mental, but as an *abstract* object; culture is here a set (in the mathematical sense) of *instances of behaviour* (or *actions*) of the past, present and future, rather than psychological properties underlying this behaviour. If, for instance, Finns are repeatedly observed taking saunas, drinking large quantities of beer and pausing pointedly before taking their turn in conversation, these actual instances of behaviour and similar instances to be expected in the future may come to be regarded as constituting a typical *pattern of behaviour* of regular visits to the sauna, increased consumption of alcohol and hesitating speech that is henceforth called "the Finnish culture".

For our purposes, what is important about these conceptual distinctions is this: the concept of culture presupposed in the following sections of this paper is *neutral* with regard to culture as an *abstract* and culture as a *mental* object. If we speak in these pages of "culture" or "cultural traits", these terms may be taken to refer to psychological properties as well as to patterns of behaviour. What is important is that these properties or patterns are *typical* for the members of a certain nation or, in the case of the GSEs, of a group of nations, where "typical" means just that members of the respective nation or group of nations possess this trait or show this behaviour significantly more often than members of other nations or regions.

Having clarified our concept of culture, we now move on to discuss a number of important properties that *studies on culture* share. Generalizing somewhat, one might say that the ultimate aim of all research on cultural traits and differences (or at least all such research in management and business administration studies) is to *identify characteristics of cultures which potentially lead to conflict when members of these cultures interact with members of other cultures*. Researchers thus hope to arrive at statements like "Germans speak their minds", or "Finns pause before taking their turn in conversation", where "directness" and "delayed turn-taking" are regarded as potentially disruptive in intercultural interactions.

In order to discover cultural traits of interest, researchers traditionally adopt one of two strategies: *microanalysts* (the term is Bolten's; cf. e.g. Bolten 2002) focus their attention on concrete instances of interaction and communication. These are recorded and transcribed and then subjected to a detailed analysis of what happens at every stage of the interaction. On the basis of such painstaking work, the microanalyst finally puts forward hypotheses on conflict-laden cultural characteristics.

Macroanalysts, in contrast, do not focus so much on (inter)cultural interaction as on cultures themselves: cultures are described and compared with each other, and only afterwards are possible consequences for interactions between members of certain cultures derived therefrom. Cultural traits are identified by such diverse means as qualitative interviews (Kluckhohn/Strodtbeck 1961), participant observation (cf. Kluckhohn 1940), linguistic analysis (Whorf 1956, Hall 1976) or quantitative surveys (Javidan/House 2002, Hofstede 2001; cf. section 3).

Both microanalytic and macroanalytic approaches are plagued by the three "inherent vices" mentioned in section 1. First, by the *problem of induction*: in particular, the hypotheses on cultural traits produced by microanalysts usually rest on a very small number of concrete observations – indeed, often just on a single one. As Bolten (2002) has rightly criticized, the inductive generalizations thereby made are accordingly shaky.

Secondly, by the *problem of interpretation*: in order to identify the cultural traits of interest, all microanalyses and many macroanalyses proceed by more or less large detours insofar as their immediate objects of investigation are phenomena such as communicative exchanges, various sorts of interactional and other behaviours, and even grammatical structures. Hypotheses about cultural traits are then formulated on the basis of observations about these phenomena. There is thus much interpretational work involved when, for instance, Whorf (1940) concludes from the grammar of Hopi that its speakers have a subjective conception of time, or when the microanalyst Tannen (2010) concludes from her observations on male and female language use that women use conversation to establish and strengthen relationships, whereas men primarily seek to exchange information.

Thirdly, by the *problem of adequate specificity*: in striving to characterize and compare cultures by means of just a small number of concepts, macroanalysts have a strong tendency to speak too vaguely. The statements of microanalysts in contrast are likely to be too specific and thus true of only one or a few individual instances. The result in both cases is that little or no genuine scientific knowledge is produced, since the statements in question lack predictive power and reproducibility. Where the statements are too vague, it is unclear *what* is predicted

or to be reproduced;[2] where the statements are too specific, it is clear what is predicted or to be reproduced, but the prediction or reproduction fails because the predicted result does not occur *in exactly the way required*, or because the result to be reproduced cannot be reproduced *in exactly the way required*.

In order to counteract all three problems, we resorted to a set of methodological ploys that are rarely used by other researchers.[3] In our qualitative interviews, our subjects either had experience of intercultural encounters or were regularly involved in such encounters. We asked them directly about conflict-laden cultural traits, or tried by other means to elicit statements from them about such traits. In thus tapping into the interviewees' pool of experiences, we provided our study with an enlarged "first-level database" in the simplest of ways. At the same time, by delegating the interpretation of these first-level data to the interviewees, we largely protected their interpretation against influence on our part.[4] In this way, both the problem of induction and the problem of interpretation were mitigated.

Our study also tried to answer the problem of adequate specificity by taking care to formulate statements that are *as general as possible and as specific as necessary*. For this purpose, the insights into conflict-laden cultural traits gained from the qualitative interviews are couched in the very general terms of just three pairs of contrasting concepts (*objectivity vs proximity*, *initiative vs passiveness*, *planning vs creativity*), but given adequate specificity by additional analysis and interpretation within historical, political and social contexts.

The statements resulting from these procedures can be viewed as *hypotheses* about cultural traits of GSEs and Hungarians that are potentially disruptive in encounters between them. Given their basis in a fairly broad qualitative survey with the methodological virtues just discussed, these hypotheses already possess

2 In section 5.3, we will show how Hofstede's dimension of *uncertainty avoidance* suffers from the vagueness of its definition. Speaking of vagueness: the concepts of *vagueness* and *overgeneralization* should be kept apart. A scientific statement or law is *vague* if it states that p – which can be understood as p' or p'' or p'''… – is always the case (and it may or may not in fact be true that p' or p'' or p'''… is always the case; in the first instance, the statement is vague but true, in the second it is vague and false). A statement *overgeneralizes* if it states that *exactly p''* is always the case, although *exactly p''* is true of only one or few individual cases (the statement is thus false. It states that exactly p'' is always the case, which is false, although it may be that either p' or p''' or p''''… is always the case). Bolten (2002) confuses vagueness with overgeneralization when he writes that "the macroanalytic approach using 'dimensions of culture' leads to overgeneralizations: what you get are abstract average values that fail to say anything about actual individuals and actual behaviour within cultures, let alone behaviour in intercultural contexts".

3 Partial exceptions are Szalay (2002), Meierewert/Horváth-Topcu (2001) and Meierewert/ Dunkel (2002, 2004), who also use qualitative interviews to ask directly about conflict-laden cultural characteristics. Their studies, however, make fewer generalizations than ours, and do without additional corroboration by a broader survey.

4 Though it goes without saying that the statements made by the interviewees may require interpretation on their part. Cf. the following paragraph and section 5.

a considerable degree of plausibility. Nevertheless, we hoped to gain further support for them in a second part of our study. This consisted of a quantitative survey designed to identify once again the conflict-laden cultural traits of GSEs and Hungarians, but via an approach that in methodological terms was quite different from the qualitative study, and also slightly different in how the decisive questions were formulated. The details of the design of both the qualitative and the quantitative part of the study will be presented in section 4.

3. Previous research

Since its beginnings in the US in the 1960s, the academic study of culture and intercultural encounters has grown into a huge field encompassing an enormous variety of research interests and methods (for a concise overview, cf. Bolten 2002, 2007). Most of the studies investigating intercultural interaction in business contexts are macroanalytic and quantitative; surely the best-known work of this kind is that of Geert Hofstede (Hofstede 1980, 2001, Hofstede et al. 2010). From 1967 to 1973, Hofstede conducted a survey among 117 000 employees of IBM in more than 70 countries. By means of a statistical analysis of this and subsequent surveys, he distilled four "cultural dimensions" that he later expanded to six. Technically speaking, these are just interval variables taking values from 0 to 100 (Hofstede prefers the term "indices"), which serve to characterize cultures quantitatively and to compare them with each other. Thus we have, for instance, the dimension of *uncertainty avoidance*, which Hofstede characterizes as follows:

> *Uncertainty avoidance can [...] be defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. This feeling is, among other manifestations, expressed through nervous stress and in a need for predictability: a need for written and unwritten rules. (Hofstede et al. 2010: 191; emphasis in the original)*

> *The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting strong UAI [Uncertainty Avoidance Indices] maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles. (Hofstede 2016)*

On Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance scale, Hungary reaches the very high value of 82, in contrast to Denmark, for instance, with 29 points (Hofstede et al. 2010: 193 f.). Together with the indices in other dimensions, Hofstede thus manages to provide a very straightforward and concise picture of the Hungarian and Danish cultures and the differences between them.

Hofstede's studies have been hugely influential, and his notion of cultural dimension has been variously adopted not least for consulting purposes. In this regard we should mention Fons Trompenaars, who operates with seven dimen-

sions heavily inspired by Hofstede (Trompenaars 1993), and GLOBE ("Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness"), a large-scale research project investigating the effectiveness of "leader styles" in different world regions, where the latter are delimited by means of nine largely Hofstedean cultural dimensions (cf. House et al. 2002).

Hall (1976, Hall/Hall 2001) also takes a macroanalytic but qualitative approach to culture. On the basis of his observations as an anthropologist in Western and Eastern industrialized countries, Hall captures cultural differences by means of four dimensions. These, however, do not come with interval scales, but with just two values. With regard to the dimension *monochronic vs polychronic*, for instance, members of monochronic cultures tend to deal with one task at a time and to do careful scheduling, whereas polychronic cultures are more flexible in their temporal organization and like to pursue several activities simultaneously.

Most qualitative work focuses on just a small number of cultures and studies them in depth. There exists a handful of studies of this kind on the Hungarian and/or GSE cultures. Peterson (2003) presents the results of 46 qualitative interviews with managers of Western European and US companies that have subsidiaries or joint ventures in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, including Hungary. Peterson's focal themes are the strengths and weaknesses of local employees and how they cope with the exigencies of the market economy that is still relatively new to them. Danis (2003), making use of the cultural dimensions of Trompenaars, puts forward seven hypotheses on how "values, practices and systems" of Western and Hungarian managers are likely to differ due to their different cultural and historical backgrounds. He tests these hypotheses by means of 44 qualitative interviews with Westerners and Hungarians in 17 "international cooperative ventures".

There is only a small number of studies of intercultural interaction specifically between GSEs and Hungarians in business contexts. Meierewert/Horváth-Topcu (2001) and Meierewert/Dunkel (2002, 2004) deal with encounters between Hungarians and Austrians, Szalay (2002) with interactions between Hungarians and Germans. Meierewert and her co-authors identify a number of conflict-laden differences with regard to attitudes towards rules and regulations, personal relations, power distance, understanding of leadership, and time management. Szalay, using 75 interviews with German superiors and their Hungarian employees in large German companies, locates important differences in the areas of working methods, conflict culture, personal relations and power distance.

4. Methods of data collection and analysis

For the first, qualitative part of our study, our main author Krisztina Frankó, herself a native Hungarian with proficiency in German, conducted 25 guided interviews with both GSEs and Hungarians. These were employees of subsidiaries or

joint ventures of four German, Austrian, Swiss and Liechtenstein companies from the industrial, trade and services sectors, with workforce sizes from 50 up to 1200. The total of 25 interviewees was composed as follows with regard to sex, position and nationality:

- 2 women, 23 men;
- 2 managing directors, 1 executive board member, 17 members of middle and higher management, 1 technical specialist, 3 staff members, 1 trainee (working in a project);
- 15 Hungarians, 4 Austrians, 4 Germans, 1 Liechtensteiner, 1 Swiss.

All interviews were held at the interviewees' workplace in Budapest, each taking approximately 1.5 hours. The guided interview is designed to ensure that the exchange does not digress too heavily from the core topic of interest (cf. Zaugg 1996: 270-272); at the same time, it allows for the spontaneous adaptation of the interview where this seems appropriate.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the transcripts subjected to what its inventors call a "structure-imposing qualitative content analysis" (cf. Mayring 2010, Schreier 2014). This type of qualitative analysis essentially consists of combing large quantities of textual data for passages that are relevant for answering one's research question; the passages are then ordered and the core statements distilled from them by means of a process of interpretation that may or may not have recourse to contextual elements. In order to provide a more concrete picture of what this meant for our study, in what follows we set out the procedure applied, step by step, and by means of some actual textual data. This abstract description of the individual steps largely follows Schreier (2014):

Step 1:   Definition of coding categories (i.e. headings under which passages are collected and ordered) in accordance with the research question.

Though there are authors who strictly distinguish between the deductive and inductive determination of categories (cf. Schreier 2014: 4 f.), we would presume that in practice, there are always both deductive and inductive elements in play: categories are partly derived from the research question, partly the result of inductive generalization from the data. We thus consider step 1 not as a strictly "initial" step of the analytic procedure, but as intertwined with steps 2 and 3.

We ultimately arrived at the following categories for coding our textual material: *working methods, time management, attitude towards rules and regulations, separation of private and business life, conflict culture, power distance, understanding of leadership, decision making*. The assumption underlying this set of categories was that statements on these themes, perhaps along with pieces of cotext and context information (cf. step 3), would yield immediate answers to our research questions – that is, they would either themselves be statements about

the cultural differences that potentially cause conflict in encounters between GSEs and Hungarians, or would allow for the derivation of such statements.

Step 2:   Definition and coding of coding units (i.e. identifying relevant text passages and assigning them to the coding categories). In the course of this process, the set of coding categories may be revised continually.

In our case, this amounted to skimming the interview transcripts for relevant statements by the interviewees and assigning them to the appropriate coding category. For instance, the statement "the fact that we don't define explicit and precise deadlines in Hungary is a huge problem", found in an interview with a Hungarian development engineer, was assigned to the category of *time management*. In the course of our analysis, the items in this latter category, along with those pertaining to *attitude towards rules and regulations* and *working methods,* began to reveal a general pattern of behavioural differences between GSEs and Hungarians. This pattern could be captured by the adequately general, but also adequately vague, concepts of *planning* and *creativity*. This is what we mean when we say in sections 1 and 2 that the pair of concepts *planning vs creativity*, and analogously the two other pairs *objectivity vs proximity* and *initiative vs passiveness*, enabled us to state our qualitative insights in the most general terms possible.[5]

Step 3:   Definition of context units (i.e. pieces of background information that may be used in interpreting the coding units) and interpretation of coding units, with or without having recourse to context units.

Mayring (2010) distinguishes "narrow context" or cotext – i.e. the totality of textual material that contains the coding unit to be interpreted – from "wide context", i.e. all other kinds of background information. In our study, the statements of other interviewees entered the interpretation process, as did a wide range of contextual factors. In section 5.3, for example, we suggest how an apparent contradiction between coding units (namely, various statements concerning the Hungarian attitude towards rules and regulations) can be resolved by reference to Hungarian history.

Step 4:   Presentation of results, answering the research question.

Our results are presented in detail and illustrated by selected excerpts from the interviews (coding units) in the next section.

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5 In the technical jargon of qualitative content analysis, the three concept pairs can also be understood as *superordinate coding categories* that generalize the results of the "initial" coding categories.

As mentioned in sections 1 and 2, the results of our qualitative interview analysis were rechecked in a second part of the study by means of a quantitative survey. Due to limited time and financial resources, this survey was carried out exclusively among GSE managers and specialists who had been active in Hungary for at least six months at the time of questioning.

The questionnaire was designed so as to identify, in various ways, the perceived *causes for conflict*, *success factors* and *potential for improvement* with regard to encounters between Hungarians and GSEs. For instance, one question asked the subjects about the factors that they believed had likely played a role in their being selected to move to Hungary; another question invited them to state immediately what they themselves considered as success factors for intercultural interaction. Most responses had to be given in terms of prefabricated items which had been devised on the basis of the results of the qualitative study: subjects could either make a selection from a set of such items, or assess them on Likert-type scales. Only occasionally were they free to provide an answer in one or two sentences of their own.

The conditions under which the quantitative study was conducted turned out to be rather unfavourable, so that ultimately just 52 questionnaires (out of a sample of 225 targeted subjects) were amenable to analysis – only twice the number of qualitative interviews processed. As a consequence, we cannot guarantee that our results reflect the views of the totality of GSE managers and specialists working in Hungary. Nevertheless, they are unequivocal enough to provide an initial substantiation of the results of the qualitative part of our study. The quantitative results are presented in section 6; excerpts from the questionnaire and the guidelines for the qualitative interviews are provided in the appendices to this paper.

5. Results of the qualitative study

The results of the qualitative part of our study are presented in three subsections. The headings of these subsections correspond to the three pairs of contrasting concepts that capture the delicate cultural differences between GSEs and Hungarians in a general way. These headings may be reminiscent of the names of familiar macroanalytic cultural dimensions; however, after what has been said in sections 1, 2 and 4, it should be clear that they are not at all intended as such. There is no question of assigning (supposedly) precise values to the GSE and Hungarian cultures on two-valued dimensions, let alone on interval-scaled dimensions. What we aim at instead is a refined (and thus, we hope, *truly* precise) qualitative diagnosis of conflict-laden cultural differences between GSEs and Hungarians.

5.1 Objectivity vs proximity

Under the heading of "objectivity vs proximity", we discuss cultural differences between Hungarians and GSEs that pertain to the coding categories *power distance, understanding of leadership, decision making, conflict culture* and *separation of private and business life*. In common macroanalytic approaches, these differences would probably be captured by the Hofstedean cultural dimensions *power distance* and *individualism–collectivism* or by Trompenaars' *specific vs diffuse* dimension. Thus a first definite result of our study is that Hungarian employees take more pronounced inequalities within hierarchical structures for granted than do GSEs. Hungarians associate higher hierarchical positions with absolute power and with status symbols such as company cars and other fringe benefits. It is acceptable for Hungarian superiors to call employees to their office and to be curt with them. The following observation by a German-speaking department manager nicely illustrates the greater power distance common in Hungary; moreover, it gives an impression of the microanalytic acuteness with which some of our interviewees reflected on their experiences with intercultural encounters:

> [...] in meetings in Hungary [...], when my boss asks a question and I have no answer, I ask my Hungarian colleagues. Then it happens, not always, but often, that the Hungarian colleague turns towards me and addresses his answer to me. I've noticed this also in other departments. [...] When different management levels meet in Germany, this is very different. When a manager with a relatively high position asks something, anyone of lower rank will feel free to answer him directly, regardless of how great the hierarchical distance between the two of them may be. (A4[6], department manager, German)

The greater power distance in Hungary is mentioned time and again in the interviews, particularly by GSEs; for instance, in the following comments on leadership:

> I'd say that on a collective level, there's a stronger desire for rigid leader styles than I've met with in Swiss environments. (B2, managing director, Swiss)

> I do think that [the Hungarians] were used to more aloofness on the part of higher managers. (B1, head of finance, internal services and HR, Liechtensteiner)

The more pronounced inequality shows not least when it comes to open conflict between Hungarian superiors and their employees. The following comment of an Austrian interviewee speaks for itself:

> I'd never have dared in my 25 years [at the company] to speak like this. I wouldn't have had any employees left, or the works council would have called me next day to tell me I was insane. The way he speaks to his people is just incredible. (D5, senior client advisor, Austrian)

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6 Letter/number combinations serve to distinguish interview partners: "A4" is short for "interviewee no. 4 of company A".

It is also noticeable to the Hungarians that GSE superiors prefer a much more sober tone:

A large and fundamental difference in my view is that German superiors never get personal. [...] Even when someone is criticized harshly, one then moves on. Something went wrong, we've talked it out, now let's get on with things. (A5, development engineer and group leader, Hungarian)

Considering the intensity with which conflicts may be carried out in Hungary, it is no wonder people try to avoid them for as long as possible:

I've seen how in tricky situations, one tried to find a solution with which everyone could live – probably due to the Hungarian mentality with its tendency to avoid conflict, something I've noticed also with the managers whom I've got to know personally. (A4, department manager, German)

In an apparent contradiction to their tougher conflict culture, Hungarian superiors and their employees tend to be closer to each other on a personal level than GSEs. In the German-speaking business world, private and business affairs are strictly separated, whereas in Hungary, there is hardly any such separation. Germans in particular prefer detached and formal business relations; where personal feelings intrude, they are quick to smell cronyism and corruption. For Hungarians, in contrast, personal relations play an important role:

In Hungary, when you get on well with people from work, this has an impact on how you actually work together. Personal relations affect your professional life. (C6, head of product development, Hungarian)

With the Germans, impersonal relations at the workplace without closer friendships are the norm. Accordingly, their leader style is direct and oriented towards profit and results. (C5, head of documentation and development, Hungarian)

Austrians and Swiss take more of a middle position in this regard. The former are ready to meet colleagues in private in order to ensure smooth relations at work. The Swiss are also in principle open for informal contacts; however, they like to keep at a minimum distance so as to prevent accusations of favouritism.

In sum, for GSEs, life at work is or should be characterized by reserve, detachment and frankness and a corresponding capability to express and accept criticism soberly and directly. Hungarian employees tend towards emotionally more intense and more personal relations, of a kind that in the GSE culture is restricted to the private sphere – to relations with the partner or family. Among Hungarians, conflict is avoided as long as possible; when it does break out, emotions break free with vehemence and passion.

5.2 Initiative vs passiveness

The cultural differences treated in this section relate to the coding categories of *working methods, understanding of leadership* and *decision making*. They touch on the Hofstedean dimension of *individualism–collectivism* (and, marginally,

also on that of *uncertainty avoidance*), but are not adequately captured by it. They are differences in the willingness to take the initiative and in the relative weighting of tasks and personal relations; but the term "collectivism" applies in their regard at best with a pejorative connotation, whereas Hofstede would surely insist on a non-normative understanding of his concepts.

Although it involves a risk of reinforcing stereotypes, we here venture the hypothesis that the history of Hungary with its repeated episodes of occupation and foreign rule has engendered two specific traits that pervade Hungarian culture to this day: on the one hand, a talent for improvisation that enabled survival in times of turmoil (how this manifests itself in everyday working life will be discussed in more depth in section 5.3); on the other hand, an emphasis on personal relations and group membership. We have already encountered this latter trait in the previous section, where it revealed itself as a positive aspect of Hungarian collectivism – strong social cohesion and the importance of personal relations. However, in the present section, its downside (at least from a Western perspective) comes to the fore. Here it constitutes an attitude, rooted in national history, which leads individuals to conceive themselves as a small and passive mechanical component in a huge clockwork mechanism: a component that only moves on external impulses and that transmits these impulses without much reflection on its neighbouring components.

In GSE culture, superiors expect their employees to display a certain willingness to take decisions autonomously and to accept responsibility for them. Accordingly, the employees themselves take a degree of autonomy and responsibility for granted. In the history of Hungary, however, autonomous thought and action were hardly ever desirable, and in much of the 20th century they were explicitly unwanted. The resulting lack of independence is glaringly apparent at the workplace, as both GSEs and Hungarians affirm in the interviews:

> *[…] what's thoroughly absent here is autonomy. Everything must be ordered and demanded. […] when I put my finger on it with someone and criticize them, what I hear is: I wasn't told, there's been no written confirmation, I had no orders, there's no stamp. (D5, senior client advisor, Austrian)*

> *When we read regulations or instructions, we don't think about whether they actually help to improve our work or not. […] I'm not saying we're automata, but in this respect we're pretty limited. (C6, head of product development, Hungarian)*

> *A common obstacle, I've mentioned it before, is that the Hungarians consider the Austrians to be the decision-makers and thus don't even try to have a say. (C2, management assistant, Hungarian)*

It may be, however, that younger Hungarians are gradually dropping this conception of themselves as "underlings", as suggested in the following observations of a German interviewee:

Older employees take the attitude: "I get orders for my tasks and I do what I'm ordered to do, everything else is not my business". It's a generational issue though; this is behaviour stemming from the past. "I don't do anything without orders!" Looking out for tasks all by oneself and approaching them independently, that is, assuming responsibility, is a delicate matter. Younger people are more active in this regard. They're more willing to accept the total complexity of a task and to deal with it accordingly, taking responsibility, as they would be expected to do these days, after all. Here the older ones are struggling, and badly so. (C3, head of development and production, German)

The Hungarian "passiveness", as we choose to call it, also fits in with the Hungarian conflict culture we discussed in the previous section. As we saw there, discontent is suppressed for as long as possible. When the last straw breaks the camel's back, however, Hungarian employees will patiently endure their superior's fury, whereas GSEs are likely to react with objections, self-justifications and, as the case may be, formal protests on the part of the work council.

This Hungarian passiveness is also noticeable when it comes to motivation. With GSE employees, self-motivation is of fundamental importance; they can only be motivated from without when they already possess a minimum of self-motivation within themselves. For Hungarians, in contrast, extrinsic motivational factors play a far larger role. Perhaps the most important such factor in Hungary is positive feedback for work well done, or a renewed assignment of interesting and challenging tasks:

Material incentives may be effective for some time, but what I think would really count is a "Thank you", a "Could you perhaps, if you don't mind", and positive feedback. (A3, HR assistant, Hungarian)

[…] when the team leader is happy, the Hungarian employee is motivated. (C2, project trainee)

As hinted by A3, however, material incentives must not be neglected, as is confirmed by both sides:

One will just have to accept Hungarian peculiarities, such as the fact that money can motivate people here. (C1, head of HR, Hungarian)

Money plays a much larger motivational role in Hungary than in Germany. There are surely straightforward reasons for this, because salaries are still lower here while costs of living have by now reached levels similar to elsewhere, so that money simply is an essential point. This means that motivation is above all a matter of cash, no doubt about it. (C3, head of development and production, German)

[German employees] have more respect for their work, for what they do, they identify with it, so that they get satisfaction out of it. Motivation comes from the job and not from the payment. (C6, department manager development, Hungarian)

To sum up, Hungarian subordinates are clearly less used to acting autonomously and to assuming responsibility than GSEs. As we have suggested, this Hungarian passiveness is perhaps traceable to the negative aspects of a deeply rooted societal collectivism, though it need not necessarily become a problem in intercultural interaction. It does, however, require more active intervention on the part

of superiors and, occasionally, a resort to HR practices that appear dated from a Western perspective – for instance when it comes to motivation.

5.3 Planning vs creativity

The insights from the qualitative study presented in this third subsection concern cultural differences that show their effects in *working methods, time management* and the *attitude towards rules and regulations*. These results are particularly instructive with regard to the methodological issues we raised in section 2 and passim. For if we compare them to the "index" assigned to Hungary by Hofstede's *uncertainty avoidance* scale, a fundamental flaw in Hofstede's framework is revealed: it simply cannot provide the precise, balanced analysis that qualitative approaches like ours make possible.

Before exploring this point in detail, we shall present a number of observations by both Hungarians and GSEs on differences in working methods and time management. These paint a picture according to which GSEs take a structured, analytical approach to their tasks and emphasize compliance with schedules, whereas Hungarians prefer a more creative attitude allowing for a greater degree of flexibility and improvisation.

> German colleagues expect all the minute details to be perfect and therefore plunge deeply into those details. Sometimes we feel they go to extremes, the detailed way they grapple with things. (A5, development engineer and group leader, Hungarian)

> Germans love excessive documentation and regulation, which sometimes has processes stalling. (C6, head of product development, Hungarian)

The Hungarians attribute precision and punctuality also to the Swiss:

> The Swiss in general, as I've come to know them, are very precise and always on time. (B6, sales chain manager, Hungarian)

> For example, they [the Swiss and Liechtensteiners] strictly comply with schedules, it's something they're particularly good at. (B5, regional sales manager, Hungarian)

Some caution is certainly called for here, considering that precision and punctuality are extremely stereotypical GSE characteristics that might well distort the Hungarian interviewees' perception. The same goes for the self-assessment of the Swiss and Liechtensteiners, who declare themselves emphatically to be precise and punctual. Despite these caveats, however, it remains true that both sides acknowledge enormous cultural differences regarding planning, precision and time management, and perceive these to be particularly problematic for intercultural cooperation:

> Yes, as mentioned before, this structured approach, the transparency of method and results... Some certainly aren't capable of this, I'll have to work on it. With some of them […] it's satisfactory, but with others there's an inner resistance that I haven't managed to overcome yet. (A4, department manager, German)

In my view, the fact that we don't define explicit and precise deadlines in Hungary is a huge problem. (A5, development engineer and group leader, Hungarian)

Yes, commitment to what's been agreed is a problem sometimes. (A2, department manager, German)

On other occasions, however, Hungarian flexibility and creativity is also praised as an asset:

Surely a strength on the part of the Hungarians is their creativity. […] I'd like to emphasize once again […] the creativity and flexibility [of the Hungarians]. (A2, department manager, German)

Thus far we have arrived at a very clear-cut picture of cultural characteristics on both sides with regard to working methods and time management: GSEs as paragons of reliability draw up and follow rigid regulations and schedules in their work; Hungarians, in stark contrast, prefer a creative, flexible approach.

At this point it is instructive to look at the values or "indices" of the GSE countries and Hungary on Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance scale. As already mentioned in section 2, Hungary has the very high value of 82, compared to the average to slightly high values of 56, 65 and 70 for Switzerland, Germany and Austria respectively (cf. Hofstede et al. 2010: 193). The apparently very strong desire to avoid uncertainty on the part of the Hungarians perhaps fits the cultural characteristics we discussed in section 5.2 under the heading "passiveness";[7] but how can this be reconciled with Hungarian flexibility in working methods and time management? Have our analyses produced an incorrect picture? Or is the error Hofstede's?

The correct answer is: in principle neither nor, but we can here observe a serious deficiency in Hofstede's methodology, one for which he is criticized surprisingly rarely: his quantitative characterisations of cultures are not as precise as his interval scales suggest after all. Indeed, his dimensions are "defined" so vaguely that any index assignment on the respective scales possesses only very limited reproducibility and predictive power, and therefore does not really add much to genuine scientific knowledge.

We can restate the point more concretely by means of the case at hand. As we have seen, Hofstede's high uncertainty avoidance index for Hungarians clashes with our result regarding Hungarian flexibility and creativity; so, assuming our result is correct, Hofstede has a problem. To this, a defender of Hofstede might reply: "There is in fact no contradiction. Hungarians *do* avoid uncertainty, but not by means of rigid methodological and temporal planning – which, by the way, can also be taken to *cause* anxiety rather than relieving it – but by relying on personal relations and informal networks". This argument, however, proves one thing: that the uncertainty avoidance dimension is so vague that it can be

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7 Or perhaps not: Hungarian "passiveness" would appear to have more to do with *risk* avoidance, which Hofstede explicitly cautions us not to confuse with *uncertainty* avoidance.

interpreted in very different ways. It is *only under a suitable interpretation* (which can always be provided) that the apparently precise statement that Hungarians are much stronger uncertainty-avoiders than GSEs becomes a truth; under other interpretations, which might be just as plausible, the statement is simply false. And the interpretations in question cannot but be of a qualitative nature.

Methods that are qualitative from the beginning, such as our content analysis, may yield descriptions of cultures and cultural differences that are more complex and at times seemingly contradictory, but which for this same reason are also more powerful and precise. This is illustrated once again when we look at how Hungarians deal with rules and regulations. Here, too, we can initially observe typically Hungarian flexibility: while GSEs comply with norms, rules and regulations, Hungarians occasionally like to evade them or even break them:

> *Hungarian employees test their limits. They want to find out exactly how far they can go in their position. (A2, department manager, German)*

But in spite of this, and all their creativity and flexibility, Hungarians also have a striking penchant for bureaucracy:

> *Everything must be regimented, everything must be recorded. I find this rather difficult, coming from a team in Austria that worked together smoothly all by itself. This is something yet to be established here. Issues I used to settle in a sentence, here they must be documented, recorded, approved with stamps and signatures. (D6, client advisor, Austrian)*

> *Invoicing is a good example. Here [in Hungary] you can't correct amounts on an invoice by simply crossing them out. When we tell them [i.e. the GSEs], they say we're inflexible. Then we try to explain them that the invoice [...] must be returned, that we must cancel the invoice and make out a new one with the correct figures. Between ourselves, it also took ages till they understood that VAT can't be reclaimed on the basis of receipts, but only with proper invoices. (D2, management assistant, Hungarian)*

The Hungarians' insistence on formal procedures partly accounts for their lack of commitment to agreements mentioned further above by A2, in that they can only be expected to commit to statements and orders that meet the relevant formal standards:

> *There was trouble once when a colleague didn't accept a verbal order and demanded to get it in writing. He didn't believe that a transaction would be approved on an oral basis or via a mere phone call. [He] insisted he couldn't accept it like this. (D2, management assistant, Hungarian)*

We should note that certain statements of employees of company D suggest that company-specific issues make intercultural interaction particularly difficult there. However, the importance of rules and regulations in Hungary is also frequently mentioned by interviewees from other companies:

> *It begins with minor issues like dress code. When I showed up for the first time without a tie, I was actually asked expressly if the rule that managers had to wear ties was no longer in place. (B2, managing director, Swiss)*

Let us recapitulate at this point what we have learnt about the Hungarian attitude towards rules and regulations: on the one hand they like flexibility, they resist rigid regulations, and occasionally break a rule. On the other hand, they attach so much importance to formality that GSEs find it ludicrous at times. An attempt to explain these contradictory tendencies might go something like this: during the socialist era, Hungarians had to comply strictly with rules in the public sphere. In private, however, improvisation was necessary to ensure survival. In their working lives today, Hungarians switch freely from one of these modes to the other, depending on the degree of formality of the situation at hand.

However plausible this explanation may be, one thing is certain: it is too simplistic to assign an uncertainty avoidance index of "exactly" 82 to a culture without saying, by means of interpretation, what facts this value is supposed to reflect (or not). Only a qualitative analysis of the kind we have proposed – one that distinguishes the Hungarians' flexible attitude towards rules from their insistence on formal correctness – can account for the complex Hungarian reality in a manner that has a chance of being true to the facts.

6. Results of the quantitative study

The second part of our study, with its broader survey among GSE managers and technical specialists working in Hungary, pursued a twofold aim. First, as explained in sections 1, 2 and 4, we hoped that it would add plausibility to the insights gained from the qualitative interviews. Secondly, it was hoped that the results from the survey would directly suggest hands-on advice on how to improve relations between GSEs and Hungarians in the workplace. Those parts of the survey that exclusively served this latter aim are not presented in this paper (for them, cf. Frankó in prep.); here we will discuss only the results that can serve to re-evaluate the findings of our qualitative survey.

For this purpose, we first turn to section 2.5 of the questionnaire (cf. appendix 2), which asked subjects about the differences they perceived between GSEs and Hungarians. Out of a total of 52 respondents, 45 indicated that they had observed such differences, and more than half of this number identified differences in each of the following areas:

Table 1:   Areas in which GSEs see differences between themselves and Hungarians.

Item	Number of mentions (by 45 respondents)
Working methods	37
Compliance with deadlines	35
Way of expressing criticism	34
Power distance	31
Separation of private and business life	29

Item	Number of mentions (by 45 respondents)
Behaviour in conflict	28
Conflict resolution	27
Compliance with agreements	26
Decision making	26
Communication	25
Leader style	24
Sources of motivation	23
Orientation to results	23

Grouped according to the coding categories of the qualitative interviews, the responses provide a definite result: the areas mentioned most often pertain to *working methods* (items: working methods, compliance with agreements, orientation to results), *time management* (item: compliance with deadlines), *conflict culture* (items: conflict behaviour, conflict resolution, communication), *power distance*, *separation of private and business life*, *decision making* and *understanding of leadership* (items: leader style, sources of motivation). This shows at least that the essential differences identified by the qualitative part of our study are also viewed as such by the respondents to the survey.

Section 2.6 of the questionnaire turns on conflicts and their causes. Quite remarkably, no less than 44 of the 52 GSE respondents have experienced conflicts with Hungarian colleagues/subordinates. They were given the opportunity to describe these experiences briefly in their own words. When we again group their answers according to the coding categories of the qualitative study, the following turn out to be the most important problem areas (in this order): *working methods, understanding of leadership, conflict culture* (in particular, suppressing conflict for too long a time, and the emotional intensity displayed once strife breaks out), *time management*. Only one source of conflict is mentioned that is not captured by our coding categories: "local customs" that the GSEs had not known, or that they had underestimated in importance – for example, the celebration of name days in Hungary. So here, too, what we hypothesized to be the essential conflict-laden differences based on the qualitative part of our study are confirmed as such.

Directly following the question about conflict *causes*, we presented subjects with various factors that play a role in conflict *avoidance* which the respondents were invited to assess on Likert-type scales (cf. question 2.7). The rationale here was both to "repeat" the preceding question about causes of conflict in a different guise, and to anticipate (also in a different guise) the question posed in section 3 regarding the success factors for intercultural interaction. As the best means of preventing conflict, leadership competence and language skills win the

day: they are considered by more than half of the respondents to be *very impor-tant*.

Section 3 addressed the success factors mentioned: question 3.1 and the first part of question 3.2 asked about such factors on the part of the GSE expatriates, i.e. our own subject-participants in our survey. Here, communication and leader style along with language skills turned out to be crucial (they were judged by more than half as *important* or *very important* in 3.2), which was largely in line with the assessment of conflict-prevention factors. The second part of question 3.2 asked about success factors on the part of the Hungarian employees. Here, too, communication and language skills were regarded by more than half as *very important*. Strikingly, however, the capacity for teamwork, and remuneration in particular, were given similarly high values. This nicely confirms the point discussed in section 5.2 above, namely that material incentives still play a significant role for Hungarians. The third part of question 3.2 aimed at success factors on the part of the companies themselves. Interestingly, here, the attention paid to company-internal communication in general and to management/employee relations in general was considered to be even more important than specific attention to interculturality.

One more section of the questionnaire that is relevant for the re-evaluation of the qualitative part of our study is section 5. Here we asked about potential for improvement in intercultural interaction, and did so once again, separately, for such potential on the part of expatriates and on the part of Hungarians. 44 of the 52 GSE respondents confirmed that potential for improvement existed. The following table shows in what areas and to what extent they identified improvement potential among their Hungarian colleagues and among themselves:

Table 2:   Areas in which GSEs see improvement potential for intercultural interaction.

	Improvement potential on the part of… (number of mentions by 44 respondents)	
Item	**Hungarians**	**GSEs**
Precision	30	1
Structured approach to work	29	4
Readiness to give and receive feedback	27	15
Orientation to results	26	4
Compliance with schedules and deadlines	25	2
Language skills	23	34
Compliance with agreements	22	1
Rigid planning	22	7
Flexibility	14	8
Creativity	12	10

Unsurprisingly, the subjects we questioned regarded the Hungarians as possessing more potential for improvement in all areas (except in language skills) than our subjects themselves. This is even true for creativity and flexibility, which issued from the qualitative study as typical Hungarian virtues; these, however, got only relatively few mentions, and the difference between Hungarians and GSEs is much smaller here than for all other items. Otherwise, the results strongly corroborate the insights gained from the qualitative study: by far the largest potential for improvement on the part of the Hungarians is identified in the domains of working methods and time management. Apart from language skills, the responding GSEs show a degree of self-criticism only with regard to feedback culture and creativity. Perhaps this adds some support to the insight from the qualitative study that while Hungarians require and also expect comparatively rigid leaders, GSE superiors should take care not to suffocate processes by planning and scheduling that is too restrictive.

7. Discussion of results and concluding remarks

The study presented in this paper aimed to identify those essential cultural differences between German-speaking Europeans (GSEs) and Hungarians which potentially lead to conflict when GSEs and Hungarians interact at the workplace. In order to achieve this aim, we conducted and analyzed a series of qualitative interviews with GSE and Hungarian managers, technical specialists and lower-ranking employees who regularly engage in intercultural encounters or observe them. The principal outcome can be presented in terms of three pairs of contrasting concepts that capture the relevant cultural differences between GSEs and Hungarians in a vague but general way:

1. *Objectivity vs proximity*: Whereas GSEs like to keep their distance vis-à-vis colleagues and to remain aloof and objective in conflict situations, Hungarians show much more emotionality, both in vertical and horizontal relations at the workplace, and in carrying out conflicts.
2. *Initiative vs passiveness*: While GSEs are ready to seize the initiative and to propel things forward, Hungarians are more reluctant and like being given detailed orders and instructions with regard to both tasks and how to accomplish them.
3. *Planning vs creativity*: GSEs approach their tasks in structured, methodical ways and strive to comply with plans and deadlines. Hungarians, in contrast, need room for improvisation and creative solutions.

Up to this point, we arrive at a concise and fairly simple picture of the conflict-laden cultural differences between GSEs and Hungarians. However, the precise ways in which these manifest themselves in various contexts are more complex, and we have tried hard in our study to provide a qualitative account of them that does justice to their complexity.

The insights thus won were subsequently put to another test by means of a broader quantitative survey. Due to the relatively small number of returned and analyzable questionnaires, the results here cannot guarantee to offer a representative reflection of the views of the entire population of GSE managers and specialists working in Hungary, and should be taken as being of a more exploratory nature. It would therefore certainly be desirable to replicate this part of our study with improved response rates. Nevertheless, as far as they go, our quantitative results clearly support the insights gained from the qualitative study.

In addition, our qualitative results are corroborated not only by the survey, but also by earlier studies. For one thing, they are largely consistent with the results of Danis (2003) (and in places superior to those results due to their greater analytic depth: when it comes to uncertainty avoidance, for instance, where Danis arrives at ambiguous results that he leaves more or less without comment). The insights of Meierewert and her collaborators on intercultural encounters between Austrians and Hungarians (Meierewert/Horváth-Topcu 2001 and Meierewert/Dunkel 2002, 2004), as well as those of Szalay (2002) on encounters between Germans and Hungarians, are entirely confirmed by our study, and generalized for expatriates from all parts of German-speaking Europe.

Despite the abovementioned shortcomings of the quantitative part, we are confident that the statements won by our study on the delicate differences between GSE and Hungarian cultures are considerably more scientific (in the sense of *having predictive power* and *being reproducible*) than those of much other work on culture and intercultural encounters. If their publication in this paper can contribute to GSEs and Hungarians gaining a better understanding of each other's cultural idiosyncrasies (or at least a better knowledge of them), and if it can lead to researchers paying more attention to the methodological and conceptual challenges of studies on culture and cultural differences, then the hopes of the authors will have been more than fulfilled.

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Appendix 1: Guidelines for qualitative interviews

Qualitative interview guidelines (abridged, transl. from the original German/Hungarian[8])

A. Personal

- What is your position in the company?
- How long have you been working for this company/in this position?
- Did you have previous experience with similar international or **Hungarian** companies?
- What is your superior's nationality? With how many Germans and Hungarians do you work?

B.1 Interaction: differences

- How often and how closely do you interact with **Germans** on an average day at work? In which contexts?
- With regard to such interaction in this company, did anything strike you from the start as remarkable when compared to interaction at former employers where no foreigners were present?
- Are there aspects of **German** cooperative behaviour that were new to you (e.g. compliance with deadlines)? Are there aspects of **German** leader behaviour that were new to you (e.g. decision-making process)? Are there **German** attitudes/behaviours in the areas of working methods/orientation to results/motivation that were new to you (e.g. planning, incentives)?
- Are there aspects of cooperative behaviour that **Germans** expected of you but which were not routine to you? Are there aspects of leader behaviour that **Germans** expected of you but which were not routine to you? Are there attitudes/behaviours in the areas of working methods/orientation to results/motivation that **Germans** expected of you but which were not routine to you?
- How do you assess the **Germans**' familiarity with **Hungarian** customs and their efforts toward adaptation?

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8 Presented here is the version for Hungarian interviewees. Replace words in bold in the body text appropriately for other nationalities.

B.2 Interaction: difficulties

■ How do you feel about interaction between Hungarians and Germans in general?

■ Do you perceive specific difficulties in interaction between Germans and Hungarians?

■ Which aspects of the cooperative/leader behaviour of Hungarians and Germans do you particularly appreciate? Which do you consider as problematic?

■ Which attitudes/behaviours in the areas of working methods/orientation to results/motivation of Hungarians and Germans do you particularly appreciate? Which do you consider as problematic?

■ What do you think **Hungarians** could/should do to improve interaction with their **German** superiors/colleagues/subordinates? What would you expect of **German** superiors/colleagues/subordinates in order to improve interaction?

■ What is your personal strategy for successful intercultural interaction? Did you take any specific measures to improve interaction with German superiors/colleagues/subordinates? If so, what were these measures?

C. Culture

■ Can you identify very general cultural differences between Germans and Hungarians that might be responsible for differences in cooperative behaviour/leader behaviour/working methods/orientation to results/motivation?

■ In your view, is it the positive or the negative aspects of interculturality that prevail in this company?

Appendix 2: Excerpts from survey questionnaire (transl. from the original German)

[…]

Interaction: differences and difficulties

[…]

Do you perceive differences between GSEs and Hungarians that show up in everyday work situations and in interaction at work?

☐ yes   ☐ no (skip to 2.6)

Differences show up in the following areas (multiple answers allowed):

☐ Working methods	☐ Avoidance of conflict
☐ Compliance with schedules and deadlines	☐ Behaviour in conflict
☐ Compliance with agreements	☐ Conflict resolution
☐ Conception of quality	☐ Separation of private and business life
☐ Orientation to results	☐ Way of expressing criticism
☐ Readiness to take risks	☐ Communication
☐ Willingness to learn	☐ Leader style
☐ Sources of motivation	☐ Power distance
☐ Readiness to work in teams	☐ Decision making
☐ Ability to work in teams	☐ Other: ....

*Have you experienced conflicts with your Hungarian colleagues/
subordinates since the beginning of your stay here?*

☐ yes   ☐ no (skip to 2.7)

Please describe your experiences:

……………………………………………………………………………………..

[…]

*Please assess for each of the following factors the role you consider it to play
in avoiding conflict:*

	Very important				Entirely unimportant
Language skills	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
International experience	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Technical competence	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Leadership competence	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Communication skills	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Motivation	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Empathy	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Flexibility	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Willingness to learn	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Patience	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Other:	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$
Other:	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$	$\square_5$

Success factors

[…]

*Do you have anything like your own "recipe" for successful intercultural
interaction and cooperation? If so, please describe your approach:*

……………………………………………………………………………………

Please assess for each of the following factors the importance you consider it to have for successful intercultural interaction:

On the part of expatriates

	Very important			Entirely unimportant
Technical qualification	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Intercultural experience	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Language skills	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Specific cultural knowledge of host country	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Focus on personal relations	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Clear objectives	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Communication skills	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Leader style	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Conflict management skills	$\square1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Willingness to learn	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Interest in intercultural interaction	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Remuneration	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Stress tolerance	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Age ($\square$ young $\square$ advanced)	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
$\square$ Other:	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
$\square$ Other:	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$

On the part of Hungarians

	Very important			Entirely unimportant
Technical qualification	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Language skills	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Ability to work in teams	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Willingness to learn	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Flexibility	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Communication skills	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Patience	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Interest in intercultural interaction	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Remuneration	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Stress tolerance	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Age ($\square$ young $\square$ advanced)	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
$\square$ Other:	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
$\square$ Other:	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$

On the employer's/company's part

	Very important			Entirely unimportant
General focus on management/employee relations	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
General focus on company-internal communication	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
Explicit attention to interculturality within company	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
$\square$ Other:...............	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$
$\square$ Other:...............	$\square_1$	$\square_2$	$\square_3$	$\square_4$ $\square_5$

[…]

Potential for improvement

Do you think there is potential for improvement with regard to intercultural interaction at your company?

☐ yes   ☐ no (skip to 5.2)

If so, please tick those of the following factors which you think should or could play a role in improving intercultural interaction:

	On the part of expatriates	On the part of Hungarians
Technical qualification	☐	☐
Language skills	☐	☐
Communication skills	☐	☐
Knowledge of other culture	☐	☐
Willingness to learn	☐	☐
Flexibility	☐	☐
Creativity	☐	☐
Patience	☐	☐
Structured approach to work	☐	☐
Rigid planning	☐	☐
Precision	☐	☐
Compliance with schedules and deadlines	☐	☐
Compliance with agreements	☐	☐
Orientation to results	☐	☐
Readiness to give and receive feedback	☐	☐
Other:.............................	☐	☐
Other:.............................	☐	☐

[…]