

## **Culture Standards and their impact on teamwork – An empirical analysis of Austrian, German, Hungarian and Spanish culture differences\***

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*This article examines the impact of different cultural standards on the processes and performances of Austrian, Spanish, German and Hungarian task groups. We therefore analyzed 201 qualitative interviews with Austrians, Spaniards, Germans and Hungarians, which were conducted from 1996 to 2001. This paper uses the cultural standard framework as its theoretical background as well as the concepts of team development. The emphasis of our research is on those culture standards that have been identified as relevant for the cooperation within teams. Critical Incidents that can be explained by the above-mentioned culture standards have been categorized referring to the “Five-Phase-Model” of team development by Tuckman and Jensen.*

*In diesem Beitrag wird die Auswirkung österreichischer, spanischer, deutscher und ungarischer Kulturstandards auf die in Arbeitsgruppen relevanten Prozesse und auf die Performance in Arbeitsgruppen analysiert. Als empirische Datenbasis dienen 201 qualitative Interviews, die mit Österreichern, Deutschen, Ungarn und Spaniern zwischen 1996 und 2001 durchgeführt wurden. Das Kulturstandardkonzept sowie die Konzepte zur Teamentwicklung bilden den theoretischen Hintergrund. Der Fokus unserer Studie liegt auf jenen Kulturstandards, die für die Zusammenarbeit in Teams als relevant identifiziert wurden. Jene Kritische Interaktionssituationen, die mit den oben genannten Kulturstandards erklärt werden können, werden nach dem „Phasen-Modell“ der Teamentwicklung nach Tuckman und Jensen kategorisiert.*

*Key Words: Intercultural Teams, Intercultural Management, Intercultural Communication, Teamwork, Cultural Standard.*

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## 1. Introduction and Aims

Developments affecting the environment of organisations like globalisation, a reduced significance of national borders or technological change do not only lead to new organisational forms like large conglomerates doing business on a truly global basis, virtual organisations or organisational networks, but also lead to considerable changes inside organisations. The flattening of hierarchies as well as the increasingly project-oriented forms of organisations and work processes are only a few of the consequences organisations nowadays have to deal with. On the level of every day work we can observe a considerable increase in the use of teams and team work. In view of the above-mentioned increasingly dynamic and global environments, today's organizational groups are more often culturally diverse than ever before. There is a considerable body of literature addressing the problems linked to group work, its higher or not so high efficiency or group dynamic processes, etc. (Bettenhausen 1991, Hill 1982, Shaw 1983). Several studies already examine the impact of diversity within groups (Watson/Kumar et al 1993, Davison 1996, Watson 1998). But we still know rather little about the effects of special cultural traits on the process and performance of task-related group work.

In their study on work team members Kirkman/Shapiro (2001a, 2001b) considered four cultural values such as individualism-collectivism, power distance (Hofstede 1980), doing orientation and determinism (Maznevski et al. 1997) and their influence on teamwork. The authors suggest that considering only four cultural values in research leads to very limited results. Therefore the identification of further cultural values represents an important aim in future research.

In order to advance the already existing approaches we outline in our exemplary study a further approach that aims at identifying cultural potentials for conflicts in the context of teamwork on the basis of culture standards research .

Therefore we try to answer the following research questions:

- What kind of typical behavior or typical *observed* behavior of members from one culture in teams can we identify
- What culture standards have an impact on interactions between team members?
- Consequently, what are the resulting potentials for conflicts in teams?

We consequently examined critical incidents that resulted from interviews we conducted with 201 Austrians, Spaniards, Germans and Hungarians, because from an Austrian or German perspective working in teams with Spanish or Hungarian colleagues leads to difficulties and is different from the expectations and habits of Austrian or German partners.

- First, we analyzed critical incidents that have actually occurred in team work.
- Second, we analyzed critical incidents that have not occurred in team work but where the underlying culture standards significantly influence work in teams. In other words we identified culture standards that significantly influence those variables that are relevant for teamwork. For example the variable “attitude towards deadlines” (see Marks, Mathieu/Zaccaro 2001) will be influenced by Monochronic and Polychronic Time Concepts, or the variables “Initiating Structure” and “Consideration” (Blake/Mouton 1978) will be influenced by Person-Orientation and Fact-Situation-Orientation.

It can be seen that due to different culture standards different expectations are relevant for team leaders and team members.

## 2. Research on Cross Cultural Teams

This paper refers to the insights from cross-cultural research, mainly to the results acquired by culture standards researchers that apply the concept of Thomas (Thomas 1993; 1996 etc.) as well as to the concepts of team development (Tuckman/Jensen 1977; Marks, Mathieu/Zaccaro 2001). For the empirical analysis, data has been collected on the basis of a modified version of the culture standards concept by Thomas (1993).

### 2.1. Team processes according to Tuckman and Jensen

In our empirical analysis, we refer to the five phases model developed by Tuckman and Jensen (1977). Different phases of team development considerably influence groups and their successful cooperation, because different types of conflicts may emerge. Those conflicts that arise in the second phase and that are not solved or survived lead to a dissolution before maturity of the team. As we assume that critical interaction situations are equaled with conflict situation or conflicts, we mainly consider those phases that are important for the survival/ continued existence of the team.

*Table 1. The Five-Stage Model of Group Development (Tuckman/Jensen, 1977)*

Forming	Members get to know each other and seek to establish ground rules
Storming	Members come to resist control by group leaders and show hostility
Norming	Members work together, developing close relationships and feelings of camaraderie
Performing	Group members work toward getting their jobs done
Adjourning	Groups may disband, either after meeting their goals or because members leave

## 2.2. Cross-Cultural Teams

Different research fields can be identified when analyzing the literature on team work. One research field is the examination of individual experiences in teams. Randel (2003) and Garcia-Prieto, Bellard/Schneider (2003) chose different approaches when studying the topic of diversity and variety in teams. Garcia-Prieto, Bellard/Schneider (2003) developed a theoretical model in order to study the experiences of individuals with variety, conflicts and emotions in teams. Their approach is more general and does not necessarily deal with multicultural teams, but it could be expanded for further research.

However, in Randel's (2003) empirical study the prior aim was to examine cultural identity salience, which can be defined as the extent to which an individual finds the cultural backgrounds of his or her team members to be salient. The findings of her study suggest "that individuals who have the same cultural background as a few or many others on the team will find cultural identities to be salient" (Randal, 2003: 40). These results show limitations because teams under investigation were rather small and mutual attraction due to cultural similarity can increase the tendency towards the formation of subgroups.

Other studies investigate multicultural teams focusing on the group level. Thomas (1999) compares culturally homogeneous and culturally heterogeneous teams. The findings of his study support the hypothesis that efficiency and productivity of these teams are influenced by cultural diversity. Thomas' results are limited due to the fact that he considered only one culture dimension, namely collectivism, and only one function of teams, namely the collection of ideas and decision-making.

In different empirical studies Kirkman und Shapiro (2001a; 2001b) examine how far certain cultural values make employees resist teamwork, while other cultural values make them resist self-management. The authors see employees' resistance to self-management as a mediator between four cultural values (collectivism, power distance, doing orientation, determinism) and organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Their results show that resistance mediated the cultural value "job attitude relationships", sometimes fully and sometimes partially, depending on which type of resistance (to teams or to self-management) and which type of cultural value was being examined. Kirkman and Shapiro (2001a; 2001b) suggest that the four cultural values chosen do not explain all of the country differences in their study. Therefore the identification of further cultural values represents an important aim in future research.

Managers who know the cultural values of their employees can be able to predict more precisely the attitudes of their employees towards self-management or teams. Thus, decisions whether to implement self-management or teams can be made more easily and better predictions could be made

regarding satisfaction of employees as well as efficiency of teams and the resulting output.

Therefore the aim of our study is to identify further cultural values that have an impact on multicultural teams and that could be potentials for conflicts in cooperations. As an example we chose Spanish, Hungarian, German and Austrian critical incidents referring to the culture standards approach developed by Thomas (1993). In order to outline the team processes we chose the five phases model developed by Tuckman/Jensen (1977). In spite of the shortcomings of the model, mainly because of methodological insufficiencies and lack of empirical evidence (e.g. Simon 2003), this stage-based model is proved for being highly relevant for practice and it also shows a dynamic perspective (West/Hirst 2003). We think that these dynamic elements – emergence of conflicts, development of group norms – are significantly important for intercultural teams. In this particular context, new cultural norms develop over a certain period of time and conflicts are relevant due to different culture perspectives and assumptions. Referring to the narrative interviews we conducted with managers who have been working in culturally mixed teams, we rather preferred to chose the variables of the model by Tuckman/Jensen (1977) than the variables of the model by Marks, Mathieu/Zacarro (2001) which is more static.

### 3. Methods applied in Cross-Cultural Research

Cross-cultural knowledge which is applied in management is mainly created at three distinct levels:

- Psychological and social processes at the level of the individual (e.g. Adler 1985; Black, Mendenhall/Oddou 1991; Fiedler/Mitchell 1971; Parker--7McEvoy 1993; Ward 1996, Mayrhofer/Brewster 1996; Bolten 2001).
- Macro-level studies on the impact of cultural differences on technology or organizational structure (e.g. Trice/Beyer 1984; Hult, Ketchen/Nichols 2002; Fink/Mayrhofer 2001; Holden 2001; Schein 1988; Morgan, Kristensen/Whitley 2001; Sagiv/Schwartz 2000).
- Macro-orientated general concepts like cultural dimensions (e.g. Hofstede 1990; Trompenaars 1993; House et al. 2002), cultural standards (Thomas 1993; Krewer 1996), anthropological research (e.g. Douglas 1978; Hall/Hall 1990; Fiske 1991) and handbooks (e.g. Gannon 1994; Hill 1998).

The level is important for the choice of the methods applied. In each context different rules are valid. It makes a big difference whether two equal partners negotiate or one superior gives orders to his subordinate. Socialization and therefore also cultural socialization (enculturation) of interacting partners



influence their expectations on how certain situations have to proceed or not to proceed. In the following study the context of intercultural teamwork from the perspective of German, Austrian, Hungarian and Spanish managers is described.

### **3.1. Culture standards**

One of the important characteristics of the culture standards approach is the definition of culture as a complex “system of orientation”. The core elements of this orientation system are culture standards, which combine all forms of perception, thinking, judgment and behavior (Thomas 1988; Thomas 1996:112; Thomas 1993). After their process of socialization in one particular culture, individuals are not aware of their culture standards when interacting with representatives from their own culture (Thomas 1993: 381). When entering a foreign culture system individuals may experience situations that are unfamiliar, they are unable to interpret what is called a “critical incident” (Thomas 1993: 381).

It should be emphasised that culture standards are not a complete description of a culture. They are ways of seeing and interpreting the cultural experiences which certain individuals, as members of specific target groups in specific contexts, encounter with partners of a foreign culture. However, it is also important to bear in mind that these culture standards were developed from what was indeed routinely experienced, that is, from what was regarded as “typical” intercultural interactions.

### **3.2. Context specific culture standards**

In her investigation Dunkel (2001) created sub-samples in order to analyze the influence of subcultures and different corporate cultures. This is an answer to the critique that the bias of different fields of action is neglected in cross-cultural management research. Comparing those critical incidents that are experienced in different fields of action, one can see that they differ from each other and that interviewees from different subsamples are confronted with different interaction situations. For example, students don't experience interaction situations that can be subsumed under the culture standard “amigo's business” (Dunkel 2001: 175).

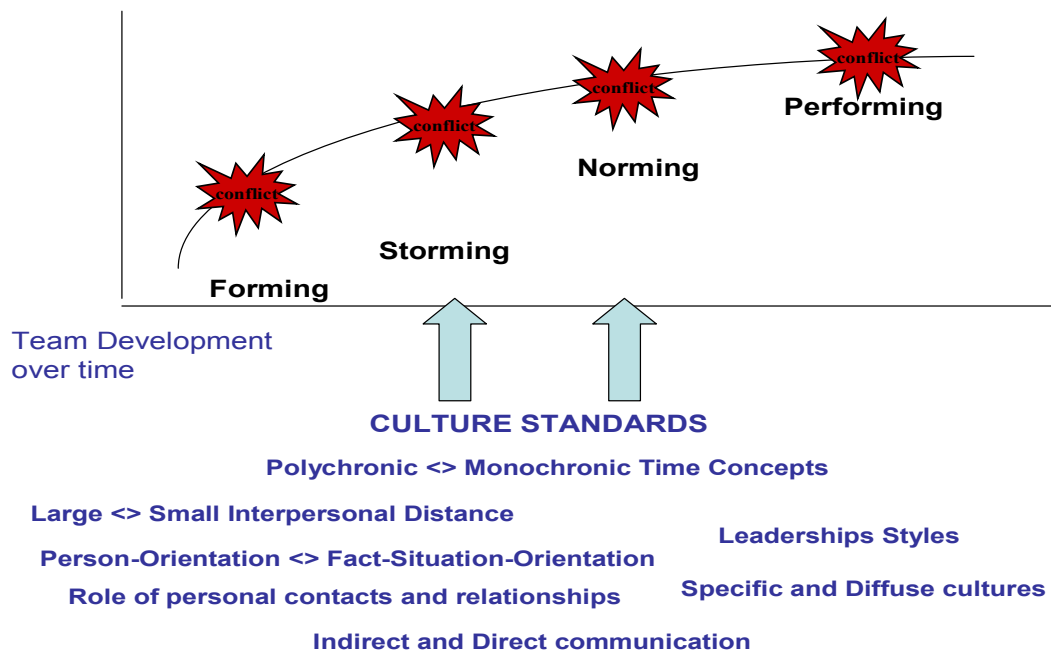
## **4. Design for our research**

In the following sections the design for our research analysis shall be demonstrated: Interviewees reported specific critical interaction situations referring to the cooperation in teams (teamwork). In this case managers mentioned concrete situations where cooperation with for example Hungarian team members was negatively experienced. Second, a couple of culture

standards were identified that very probably have an important impact on teamwork, because they increase conflicts in team development processes.

Those incidents that are reported frequently are collected and summarized in one category (one culture standard). Their content is analyzed. By the use of feedback (interviewing experts and representatives of both cultures) the collected incidents are validated and therefore culture standards can be identified. (Dunkel/Mayrhofer 2001).

*Fig. 1. Design for the analysis of the data*



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#### 4.1. Observed Behavior

Intercultural interaction occurs in a situation of cultural overlapping where customary behavior, thinking and emotions formed by one's own culture overlap with what seems unusual and strange: the behavior, thinking and emotions of those shaped by a foreign culture. Normal conduct and evaluation and interpretation patterns which until then were suitable in reaching goals fail in part or completely (Thomas 2001). Most observations refer to a typical behavior that characterizes the members of one foreign culture, i.e. what kind of

address is usually applied in an official meeting, as can be seen in the following critical incident: *“something that I realized, you use Du completely differently than in our country. That is something that was rather difficult for me, something that almost shocked me, the use of the “Du”... “people here are used to address other people with the “Du”: addressing them with their first name. Therefore everything is a little bit more personal. Consequently you discuss everything more openly, making jokes, ...”*(Dunkel 2001: 195)

#### 4.2. Basis of our Data

The empirical data applied in our research was collected in research projects (Meierewert 1999; Dunkel/Meierewert 2000), for one Ph.D.-project (Dunkel 2001) and for several theses (Kovács 2001; Horvath 1998; Huber/Renner 1996). In total, about 201 qualitative interviews were conducted in order to identify Austrian, German, Spanish and Hungarian Culture Standards:

*Table 2. Four Country of origin of the people interviewed*

	interviews with expatriates	interviews with experts
Austrian-Hungarian Comparison	67 Austrians 20 Hungarians (Meierewert 1999)	10 experts from Austria or Hungary (Meierewert 1999)
Austrian, Spanish, German Comparison	35 Austrians (Dunkel, 2001) 25 Germans (Dunkel 2001) 27 Spaniards living in Germany or Austria (Dunkel, 2001)	17 experts from Austria, Germany or Spain (Dunkel, 2001)
<b>total</b>	<b>174 interviews with expatriates</b>	<b>27 interviews with experts</b>

The major part of the interviews was conducted in the host countries of the people interviewed. After the transcriptions of the interviews their content was analyzed referring to the content analysis of Mayring (1996). Interviews for the identification of German, Spanish and Austrian Culture standards (Dunkel 2001) have been coded in “Nvivo” a computer program for analyzing qualitative data. After a certain number of interviews collected abroad, the results were analyzed in order to use feedback in the following interviews.

In those interaction situations where teamwork is described in a negative way, indications about the distribution of different national cultures are missing. In addition to this shortcoming, up to now no research on Spanish-Hungarian culture standards is available. The so-called “Austrian” and “German” culture standards are relevant for the Spanish and Hungarian interviewees, “Hungarian” and “Spanish” culture standards are seen from the perspective of the Austrian and German counterparts respectively.



## 5. Results

In the following section Austrian, German, Hungarian and Spanish culture standards and the possible potentials for conflicts in the different team development processes are described and critical incidents are added as examples.

### 5.1. Forming Phase

During the Forming stage the members get to know each other. They establish the ground rules by finding out what behaviors are acceptable regarding the job and interpersonal relations (Tuckman/Jensen 1977).

In this phase different verbal and non-verbal forms of greetings can be observed that do have a ritual character. These rituals mainly serve for estimating the personality of the counterpart and his position in the group. Culture standards which are relevant for action in this phase mainly refer to different communication patterns for greeting someone and to different concepts of time (punctuality).

## A: Different behaviour when greeting other people

### Germany

Typical Behavior that can be observed:

- formal address (“Sie”) when people meet the first time
- informal “Du” is used rather fast when people with same status interact
- shaking hands with both male and female partners

### **Culture standard: Large interpersonal distance and specific culture**

The term specific culture refers to the distinction between private and non-private i.e. business life. In this specific case the use of formal vs. less formal address is important. Personal distance means the physical and psychological distance between people. When communication in teamwork takes place, those contents are dominating, that are intended to contribute to the success of a common goal within an agreed structural framework. Different roles that have to be accepted by the team members determine the structure of the team process. All team members are considered equal and hierarchically equal when working in a team. But hierarchies persist and are demonstrated with the formal address of “Sie” or the “Sie plus title.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

When using the less formal address “Du” emotional distance within team members is reduced. Among different hierarchies the informal “Du” can usually only be used when working in teams, but not in a different context.

## **Austria**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- formal address (“Sie”) and the title when people meet the first time
- informal “Du” can be used when people with same status interact
- shaking hands with both male and female partners

### **Culture standards: Respect for achieved positions**

Different hierarchies demonstrate power and influence through the use of academic titles. Consequently one knows more about the person involved, about her or his role and status in society. These title-rules are intended to help to prevent conflicts and also to stabilize and confirm existing positions. When the titles are not used, as is the case in team work, emotional distance consequently is reduced.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

When subordinates address their superiors - i.e. when both are parties from different hierarchical levels - with “Du” this can be interpreted as a lack of respect by the superiors and it can be experienced as a threat to the position within the system. The use of the “Du” in the context of teamwork implies a less emotional distance which also has an impact on communication styles and the expectations from the cooperation even beyond the teamwork.

## **Hungary**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- informal address (TE) when women meet the first time
- change from “maga” towards “te” when men work together, even from different hierarchical levels
- embrace among female and shaking hands among male partners

**Culture standards: Small interpersonal distance**

The value of equality among people can be explained with the Hungarian history of communism. When using “Te”, this value of equality is underpinned and it also signalizes appreciation of the other partner.

**Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Emotional distance is indicated by the use of “maga”. Direct address with the “maga” and the use of academic titles are seen as an important emotional distance and it is also interpreted as if German and Austrian managers try to dominate and patronize their Hungarian partners. Women might interpret shaking hands among women as formal distances and as a rejection.

**Critical interaction situation as an example of this culture standard**

“For example I have a friend that I have known rather well for more than five or six years. We have done everything together - and when she said good-bye to me, she shook my hand! Whenever she shook my hand, a whole world broke down, I was shocked” (Horvath 1999: 46).

**Spain****Typical behavior that can be observed**

- the informal address (*tú*) is usually used extremely frequently, sometimes even when you meet someone the first time, even when people with different status interact
- it might happen that one person addresses the other with the formal *Usted* but the other person responds with the informal “*tú*”
- this small interpersonal distance is also reinforced with embracing and two kisses (*dos besos*)

**Culture standard: Person-orientation**

This culture standard refers to the personal relations which are much more important than business. The value is underlined by the less formal address “*tú*” relevant for action in everyday life, but especially in business where one rather prefers to employ his friend (*amigo*) than a person with the necessary abilities.

**Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Relationships between superiors and subordinates are described as rather cordial and friendly, mainly because of the use of the “*tú*” when addressing people. However, hierarchical structures play a more important role. From the Spanish perspective, contact between subordinates and superiors are described

as being more “factual” and more “direct”. On the one hand emotional distance is rather large in Spain, on the other hand the less formal “tú” implies a friendly basis and intimacy that in reality does not exist. The rather fast use of the informal address “tú” leads to wrong attributions of authority.

## **B: Time Concept**

### **Germany**

#### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- punctuality is essential in an official meeting

#### **Culture standards: Monochronic time concept**

Time in Germany is appreciated, it is considered as something that is valuable and that is to be used efficiently. Structured routines of the day and schedules are evidence for this significant value. Referring to the studies of Hall (1990) and Trompenaars (1993) German culture belongs to the cultures with a monochronic concept of time. Things have to be done one after the other and processes are defined and coordinated in advance. Consequently, people are bound by working hours, exact timing for appointments or strict separation of duties. This culture standard is also relevant for action in teamwork for the schedules and planning for teams.

#### **Potential Conflicts that might emerge**

Deadlines that have been agreed together are rigid, unpunctuality can be interpreted as a lack of discipline and a sign of disregard. An excuse has to be understandable for the partners involved.

### **Austria**

#### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Punctuality at the beginning of a meeting is desired

#### **Culture standards: Monochronic time concept**

The Austrian culture can also be interpreted as belonging to the monochronic cultures (Hall 1990; Trompenaars 1993). In contrast to Germany, clearly defined structures have a less important position. Deviations are more easily tolerated in order not to endanger personal relationships.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Schedules and deadlines that have been agreed are to a certain degree flexible. If the other partner excuses himself for being late, his/her unpunctuality can be accepted more easily.

## **Hungary**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Punctuality is flexibly handled at the beginning of the meetings

### **Culture standard: Polychronic time concept**

Hungarian culture belongs to the poly-chronic cultures (Hall 1990; Trompenaars 1993). Several things are done at the same time and schedules are handled flexibly. Therefore one can decide according to priorities – one can keep all possible alternatives open. Personal relations are significantly more important than structures. If their partners appreciate punctuality, Hungarians in an international context stick to deadlines because they are interested in the cooperation.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Time for meetings are flexibly arranged and modifications at a very short notice are possible. Unpunctuality can be forgiven more easily if the other partner apologizes himself. This flexibility is expected from the other partner to the same extent. Insisting on scheduled appointments can be interpreted as patronizing.

## **Spain**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Punctuality is flexibly handled at the beginning of the meetings

### **Culture standard: Polychronic time concept (Hall 1990; Trompenaars 1990)**

Time for meetings are flexibly arranged, unpunctuality can be forgiven more easily because it is supposed that the person who has to wait can do other things in the meantime.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

The beginning of meetings is flexibly stipulated and modifications at very short notice are possible. If the other partners insist on punctuality and deadlines, this can be interpreted as inflexibility.

### **Critical incident as example**

“I remember my first meeting (here in Spain). It was supposed to begin at 2 o'clock and when I arrived at 2, and people arrived at 2:15, 2:20. I could have started screaming. Well, and then afterwards they started chatting, talking about something, for 20 minutes. This was the social part of the meeting. And then they are waiting and looking, and what was the meeting about “(Dunkel 2001: 188)

## **5.2. Storming Phase**

The storming stage is characterized by a high degree of conflict within the group and consequently cooperation is endangered. If these conflicts are not resolved and group members withdraw, the group may be dissolved prematurely. Group members usually resist control by the group leader.

Differences can be observed in the following areas: applied management concepts, acceptance for hierarchical positions and leadership styles.

## **Germany**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Usually goals are determined together. The German team-leader applies MbO-tools, he expects from his colleagues autonomous action and readiness to take on responsibility
- Tendency: Open discussions and critique of the subordinates are used in order to exchange information and they are seen as factually oriented

### **Culture standard: MbO leadership style, fact-situation orientation**

In business cooperation the common goal is considered by Germans as the unifying element. Roles must be evident and skills of the people involved are highly appreciated. It is expected that tasks have to be done autonomously and responsibility is assumed. Decisions are made on a democratic basis by voting.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

If partners are not very active when discussing, and if they don't dare to take responsibility, German team-leaders might interpret this behavior as a kind of



rejection and a lack of interest in the cooperation. A passive boycott is often seen as a personal shortcoming.

## **Austria**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Goals are usually determined by the team-leader and discussed in the team. The Austrian team-leader encourages his employees to bring in ideas. He also gives the instructions, however, he expects them to be critically discussed.
- Tendency: if the employees disagree with the instructions, they refuse to execute them or boycott them passively, because the boss is seen as lacking managerial ability.

### **Culture standard: Indirect communication, MbO leadership style, power through hierarchy and authority**

It is expected that superiors behave according to their position and to their role and that they also assume responsibility for the whole process. Superiors are to distribute the tasks referring to the competencies that are available in the group. It is seen as the boss's duty to look for a consensus. In order to avoid confrontations, tasks and roles are distributed also in advance on a rather informal basis. Discussions in the teams are very often seen as a formal act.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Open confrontations expressed by Germans are experienced as emotional stress and personal attack by their Austrian colleagues in spite of the fact that confrontation is addressed to the fact, not to the person involved. This behavior might lead to a withdrawal and passive resistance of the team-members involved.

Austrians do not care so much about the fact that partners are not very active in discussions and that they don't dare to take responsibility as Germans do.

This behavior is often interpreted as timidity and a lack of confidence in one's own capabilities. In an informal context, either before or after team-meetings, suggestions, and encouragement are made and support is offered.

## **Hungary**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Goals are usually determined by the team-leaders. The Hungarian team-leader expects his ideas to be accepted and his instructions to be completed.
- Tendency: Instructions are followed, even when the majority of the employees do not share the opinion of the boss.

### **Culture standards: Hierarchy and authority, patriarchic leadership-style**

Both, authority and empathy are expected by the Hungarian team-leader. He hands out the tasks and regularly checks their completion. In order to avoid conflicts, communication very often takes place outside the official context. Thus, personal relations are guaranteed and personal involvement in order to combine interests.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge:**

Open disagreement and rejection of completing the instructions can be interpreted as questioning the competence of the team-leader. Hungarian employees often see open critique expressed by their Austrian or German colleagues as impropriety and disrespect.

### **Critical interaction situation**

“Someone stands up – I almost fainted – and he is addressing the boss “You have berated me for being two minutes late and you don’t berate the other guy though he arrived an hour later.” This in presence of everybody - I almost fainted. I couldn’t imagine this situation in Hungary. And even the response “You are right” just like that, completely naturally (Horvath 1999: 69)

## **Spain**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

If the boss integrates his subordinates in to the decision-making-process, this can potentially be seen as a shortcoming of the executive. The role of the superior is described as “ the boss is always right and therefore he has to know everything and also to check it”. Delegating something is neither desired nor executed. Decisions are not made collectively but someone from an upper position, one authority person, who must not be questioned.

**Culture standard: Hierarchy and authority, person-oriented leadership-style**

Hierarchical structures and positions have to be respected when communicating. They are sometimes even more important than competencies and capabilities of a certain employee. Referring to the scheme developed by Fiedler, the Spanish leadership style is more person-oriented while the German or Austrian leadership style is more task-oriented.

**Potential conflicts that might emerge**

By applying MbO very often executives don't receive the desired results. Obviously many Spaniards have difficulties completing their tasks independently within a certain period of time when only a deadline is given. (Dunkel 2001)

**5.3. Norming Phase**

In the Norming Stage the group becomes more cohesive and team members much better identify themselves as such, as close relationships develop and shared feelings become common. Consequently a common interest in finding mutually agreeable solutions also develops (Tuckman/Jensen 1977).

In this phase we mainly identified different expectations towards the maintenance of contacts. Space, time concept (meeting deadlines), topics of conversations and reciprocity considerably diverge in the relevant cultures observed.

**Germany****Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Meetings have a functional character for German team-members and they also serve for exchanging information. They usually take place in official meeting rooms
- Everybody might- if he/she wants- organize private meetings in his/her leisure time with other colleagues.

**Culture standards: Specific culture: Role of (establishing and maintaining) contacts**

In Germany different spheres are separated. Therefore Germans belong to the specific culture (Schroll-Machl 2003; Brück 2002; Hall 1990). Their behavior differs according to the different spheres of the people involved. When the context of team is relevant private concerns are less important, because everybody has to concentrate on the business. This is also important for the

relations between team-members, who are considered primarily as colleagues and not as possible friends.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

For German partners business meetings in Hungary or Austria are too overblown because of the invitations to restaurants and cultural events offered to them. The events are very often appreciated as national characteristics, however, hospitality is often not reciprocated.

## **Austria**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

For Austrian team-members (business partners) meetings have both a functional and a social purpose. At the beginning of business trips the partners involved often go to a *Heurigen* and at the end a cultural event is organized. Reciprocity is expected.

### **Culture standard: Role of personal contacts, diffuse culture to a certain degree**

From the German perspective Austrians don't distinguish the different spheres very clearly (Meierewert/Topcu 2001; Hall 1990). There is an overlap between private and business spheres. When communicating with other team-members very often private conversation takes also place. It is important that team-meetings are finished with informal meetings (events) in order to deepen personal relations and to establish a basis of mutual confidence.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

It is very important for Austrian business partners to guarantee and preserve the goodwill and to communicate on a rather personal basis. If the other partners do not respond, this can have negative impacts on the relations

## **Hungary**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

For Hungarians it is very important to have good relations with their business partners and team members. Therefore socializing and common events play a very important role and they are carefully organized. Attention is paid to meeting all expectations.

### **Culture standards: Role of personal contacts, diffuse culture (diffusion of life spheres)**

For Hungarians common interests and goals are very important. By the overlap of different life spheres, emotional distance is reduced in order to know more about the other person and to establish a good basis of trust.

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Hungarian interviewees always stress their abilities when organizing splendid events. They are offended when their German or Austrian business partners do not appreciate it nor respond to it.

## **Spain**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

- Spaniards consider business meetings rather as a possibility to exchange information and opinions, than for achieving a common goal or output by the group. Very often preparing a meeting (by the use of an agenda) is considered as unnecessary. These tools inhibit flexibility.

### **Culture standards: Role of personal contacts and relationships**

As mentioned above this culture standard refers to the personal relations which are much more important than business, where one even rather prefers to employ his friend (*amigo*) than a person with the necessary abilities. Consequently communication with people plays a more important role and people are rather willing to spend more time even for private matters (Dunkel 2001).

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

From a German and Austrian perspective the process of a meeting is experienced as rather inefficient, without a structure, without a system. Communication is repetitive. (Keim 1994)

### **Critical interaction situation**

„When we go out for lunch with our Spanish clients, o.k. I am thinking of a short business lunch. But here nobody will do it under three hours, not even with colleagues. In Germany we had half an hour for our lunch, one hour maximum. Here in Spain, under one and a half hours nobody will go out. In restaurants it is expected. Sometimes I get annoyed. (Dunkel 2001: 189)

## **5.4. Performing Phase**

In the last stage, the performing stage, the group is ready to work, they can devote their energy in order to get the job done (Tuckman/Jensen 1977).

In this phase the coordination for deadlines or meeting schedules is relevant as an important difference between the cultures observed. As an explanation we refer to the different concepts of time (culture standards: monochronic versus polychronic concept of time).

### **Germany**

#### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

Working time and leisure time are different spheres. There are fixed beginnings and ends of working hours and, in addition to that, breaks. Extra hours have to be paid extra or compensated through free leisure-time.

Culture standard: Specific culture, monochronic concept of time

#### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Sticking to fixed working times is necessary for a synchronous work-schedule. If the relevant business partners handle the schedules flexibly, for the German colleagues idle time is produced. They have more and more difficulties coordinating things, which inhibits a structured day schedule and agendas.

### **Austria**

#### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

Working time and leisure time is separated, extra hours have to be paid extra. Employees are more willing to meet for private and social activities in their leisure time.

Culture standard: Specific culture - with diffuse parts, monochronic time concept

#### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

Austrians are more willing/prepared to handle schedules flexibly and to meet for business purposes in their leisure time.



## **Hungary**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

Working time and leisure time are combined more strongly, very often colleagues are also friends that are met in private contexts. Extra hours are often not paid extra and Hungarians try to achieve flexible working hours. There is a tendency towards more than one job.

Culture standards: Diffuse culture, polychronic time concept (polychronic schedules)

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

In Germany and Austria Hungarian team-leaders miss the readiness to work extra working-hours without compensation. The reason for this attitude is seen in social legislation.

## **Spain**

### **Typical behavior that can be observed**

In Spain, too, leisure time and working hours are combined more strongly. In general much more time is spent for communication. In business contexts people also talk about private matters, not only about business. Usually colleagues are more interested in the private lives and families of their colleagues, superiors or business partners. Therefore also the separation of unpaid extra working hours and compensated performance is not seen very rigidly. Flexible working times are more accepted, even if it is a disadvantage for the employees regarding to the extra working hours, for example.

Culture standards: Diffuse culture, polychronic time concept (polychronic) schedules

### **Potential conflicts that might emerge**

When talking about short-term planning, improvisation is also mentioned. It is not always possible to manage improvisations successfully. When the failure of a project can be avoided in the last moment, very often only a small part of the originally defined goal can be reached. German and Austrian interviewees hold the opinion that Spaniards are rather proud of their capabilities “doing everything in the last minute so that the situation is saved”. For Austrians and Germans however, this can be very exhausting (Dunkel 2001).

## 6. Discussion

According to Thomas (1999) communication problems, different assumptions on team work, diverging opinions of solution findings and decisions making are essential obstacles for the success of heterogeneous teams. Tasks with a high level of interpersonal interactions which require creative solutions are more useful for heterogeneous working groups. Only a few statements up to now are available on synergies that may arise from multicultural teams (DiStefano/Maznevski: 2000) and under what frameworks these synergies can be achieved.

A high amount of critical incidents that has been cited was about teamwork, structure of meetings etc., however, concrete examinations in order to support these statements are missing. In order to do so we suggest participative observations as done by Schroll-Machl (2000) for processes in German-American Teams. These observations make an accurate analysis of problem solution processes possible regarding the context of different culture standards and should be integrated in future research about teams. Likewise, long term investigations and research on stereotypes are proposed in order to identify individual expectations. In addition, not only bi-cultural teams should be observed but also multi-cultural teams in order to get insights about the dynamics when many different cultures have to work together in teams.

In our existing data (critical incidents) we could not identify the role of space as a potential for conflicts in multicultural working teams. Ayoko and Härtel (2003) prove the argument that the role of space is a significant possibility to predict intensity and frequency of conflicts in multicultural teams and they also consider the possibility for action of leaders. Their study demonstrates that the role of space as a potential for conflict was underestimated in research and that there is need for further research and enlightenment.

## 7. Conclusion

In our study, critical interaction situations identified in about 201 narrative interviews were analyzed and those culture standards that reinforce conflicts in cooperations were outlined. The following design was chosen: we regarded culture standards that already had been identified and examined those that can reinforce conflicts in team development processes. The “Five-phase-model” by Tuckman and Jensen (1977) as well as new approaches in the area of team development processes (Marks, Mathieu/Zacaro 2001) were considered.

As Thomas (1999), we also came to the conclusion that culturally heterogeneous teams have more potential for conflicts, thus, resulting in more challenges for the team members. A new research focus therefore should be put on synergies in such teams and should foster creativity when handling differences in teams.

*Table 3. Culture standards and conflicts in group development processes of cross-cultural teams:*

	<b>Austria</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Spain</b>
Phase: Forming	Team members define their tasks			
<b>Culture Standards</b>	Respecting achieved positions	Large interpersonal distance	Small interpersonal distance	Person orientation
<b>Conflicts</b>	If achieved positions are not respected- it can be experienced as a lack of respect by the employee with a higher position	By the use of „Du“ emotional distance in teams is reduced	The formal address (“maga”) is experienced as a very strong emotional distance as well as a trial for domination	The formal address (“usted”) or the use of title is experienced as a very strong emotional distance.
<b>Culture Standards</b>	Monochronic concept of time	Monochronic concept of time	Polychronic concept of time	Polychronic concept of time
<b>Conflicts</b>	<i>Punctuality at the beginning of a meeting is desired.</i>	Punctuality is essential in an official meeting Unpunctuality is a lack of discipline or interest in the matter.	Punctuality is flexibly handled at the beginning of the meetings	Punctuality is flexibly handled at the beginning of the meetings

Phase: Storming	Conflicts emerge because different opinions have a polarising effect			
<b>Culture Standards</b>	Hierarchical Power Indirect Communication Style	MbO leadership Fact-Situation Orientation	Hierarchical Power Partiarthic Leadership Style	Importance of Hierarchy and Authority, Person-oriented leadership-style
<b>Conflicts</b>	Open confrontation experienced as emotional stress and personal attack – might lead to withdrawal and passive resistance of the team-members.	If responsibility is not taken this is interpreted as a kind of rejection and a lack of interest in the cooperation.	Open disagreement, rejection of completing the instructions: interpreted as questioning the team-leader. open critique is seen as impropriety and disrespect	Open disagreement or rejection of completing the instructions: interpreted as questioning the team-leader (lack of respect). open critique is seen as impropriety and disrespect

Phase: Norming	Development of norms - Cooperation is possible			
<b>Culture Standards</b>	Role of personal contacts, <i>Diffusion</i> to a certain degree	Role of (establishing and maintaining) contacts, <i>Specific culture</i>	Role of contacts <i>Diffusion</i> of life spheres	Role of personal contacts and relationships
<b>Conflicts</b>	It is important to maintain good relations	Business meetings should not be too overblown with invitations to restaurants or cultural events.	Hungarians are offended when Austrian or German business partners do not appreciate or respond their hospitality.	Spaniards are offended when Austrian or German business partners do not appreciate or respond their hospitality.

Phase: Performing	Problem solutions are important			
<b>Culture Standards</b>	Specific Culture with diffuse parts, Monochronic concept of time	Specific culture, Monochronic concept of time, Orientation towards structures	Diffuse culture, Polychronic concept of time: Flexibility	Polychronic concept of time, Importance of communication: flexibility (improvisation)
<b>Conflicts</b>	More willing and prepared to handle schedules flexibly and to meet for business purposes in their leisure time.	If schedules are flexibly handled, <i>idle time</i> is produced. They have more and more difficulties coordinating things, which inhibits a structured day schedule and agendas.	The readiness to work extra working-hours without compensation is missing.	Flexibility is more important than clear structures or even adding to structures.

According to Bijlsma-Frankema (2001) cross-cultural training tools can increase the ability to cope with potentials for conflicts, as we have outlined in our study. Consequently, teams are better able to work, because they can better concentrate on the tasks and jobs to be done.

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