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Management of transnational project: coordination, communication, cultural consideration - literature review

The goal of this document is to present the literature review concerning the management of transnational cooperation projects. However as the project focuses on project-based cooperation rather than contractual cooperation, the desk analysis was aimed rather at reviewing the literature of managing transnational relations which are rather not associated with simple trade relations, but more “sophisticated” approaches to international cooperation (like common research and innovative projects, joint ventures or common export activities on other markets). Thus the literature review has not addressed the legal or language aspects of international cooperation.

The preliminary results of the literature review indicated that there are very well-developed learning programs and universal methodologies for project coordination (e.g. PMI) but usually they do not address sufficiently and adequately the context of transnational cooperation and the needs of SMEs involved in such activities. A good example of general project management methodology is presented in Mingus N. (2002), Kerzner H., (2003) or Burton C. and Michael N. (1999). For example Burton C. and Michael N., (1999) list the following main stages for a successful implementation of projects:

- precise planning of: tasks and actions, time and schedule, money, people, goals, outputs, results;
- selection of coordinator;
- selection and assignment of people to roles and tasks;
- proper conforming of tasks to timetable and to people;
- monitoring and controlling;
- providing a full documentation on the project's completion

Burton C. and Michael N. list also the crucial considerations for a successful implementation of projects. Inter alia they included in this group the following factors:

- quick problem solving scheme (identification, finding a number of options, choosing a good one, implementation);
- team members should have a clear concept of their roles and the roles of other team members;
- a good project coordinator;
- easy access to the coordinator;
- the involvement of members of the team and management;
- fair and just division of labor;
- common goal identification;
- adequate size of project team (depending on project);
- adequate communication channels selected;
- adequate circulation of information: telephone numbers, mailing lists;
- information about current progress;
- sufficient technical equipment (hardware);
- predicting the unpredictable (problems);
- flexibility with regard to surprises - the regular updating of the plan.

The concept of managing transnational cooperation (in the context of project management) was addressed in educational guides of transnational cooperation within the frameworks of some EU funded projects (e.g. Equal, Leader +, Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates). The methodologies of project management presented in the above mentioned guides are based on the universal project management methodologies.

However, apart from the addition of the international context in the project management process, the considerations of the EU funded projects were taken into account. For example Bienzle H. (2001) lists the following special features characteristic of the European cooperation projects:

- when forming a project and the working group, it might be impossible to choose the team members;
- the team members have the opportunity to meet each other (face to face) only once, twice or three times during the project year;
- meetings are very intensive and they normally only last a few days;
- cultural backgrounds might be very heterogeneous in transnational projects
- a European project usually means extra work on top of the normal workload.

LRDP (2003) in that context stresses the issue of costing of transnational co-operation projects. It indicates that calculation and reimbursement of travel costs as well as clarification of payment arrangements should be well-defined, as the norms on this matter varies widely across Europe. The overall budget of the project, including transnational and local actions, should be carefully clarified in relation to the amount needed. It must include a clear table

showing who will pay for what, how and when. Rules for the distribution of profit (if allowed) should also be established.

The most detailed guide of managing transnational partnerships within the EU funded projects was prepared by the team lead by H. Bienzle within the frame of the Socrates Programme - Bienzle H. (2001). According to the PMI methodology it identifies five stages of successful project management:

- defining aims,
- planning,
- deciding,
- implementing,
- controlling.

It also indicates that the successful European Cooperation Project managers have to ensure, together with their teams, that the following tasks should be fulfilled:

- **planning** the whole project: the project plan should be an integral part of the application, but more refined planning should take place throughout the lifetime of a project; the general aims and objectives should be defined and translated into concrete outcomes and products; the major steps which lead to the development of the products have to be packaged and timed in a work plan;
- **organising** the project: preferably with the help of written agreements, the different roles and responsibilities within the project should be allocated according to individual strengths and expertise;
- **building up and leading a team:** a motivated team in which all members are equally involved and can rely on each other is a key factor of success; therefore much time needs to be dedicated to the development of a positive project culture; a system of conflict resolution is also necessary;
- **organising and chairing meetings:** meetings should be organised in a professional way and take the intercultural dimension of a European Cooperation Project into account; communication between meetings also needs careful planning
- **monitoring and evaluating:** if quality is to be achieved permanent monitoring of the progress of work and the evaluation of both processes and products are indispensable;
- **administering and managing the budget:** the administrative workload, especially financial management must not be underestimated; considerable time and energy can be saved if a transparent reporting system and clear agreements are introduced at the very start of a project; the usage of experience of other projects can be extremely valuable.

The next example of the guide of transnational cooperation prepared with the frame of EU funded projects is “A guide to practical approaches. Transnational Co-operation in

LEADER+” prepared by LRDP Ltd. (2003). It assumes the following stages of project implementation:

- Project development
 - Defining aims and objectives
 - Co-ordinating the project
- Partnership and partner search
 - Finding the best partners:
 - First meeting
- Implementing the project
 - Agree on objectives: Partnership agreements
 - Examining the project’s feasibility
 - Costing and financing a transnational co-operation project
 - Reporting
 - Monitoring
 - Evaluating the project

The review of project management guides indicates that the existing educational guides focus on the implementation of the projects paying little attention to the process of initiating (starting up) the projects (searching for partners, establishing partnerships, coordination of the application phase) . A little bit more attention was paid to planning process - the next phase of starting up the project. For example Bienzle H., (2001) presents the role of planning in project management through presentation of detailed planning tasks – see the table:

Table

Planning task	Planning task in detail
Content planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Defining the project aims · Defining outcomes and products · Setting quality indicators · Devising monitoring and evaluation strategies
Planning the organisation of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Structuring the main activities · Defining roles · Allocating and coordinating tasks · Time planning: phases, schedule · Devising an internal communication system
Planning human interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Choosing team members and forming teams · Creating a project culture of shared values, standards and rules · Reflecting the process of building and leading a team · Managing conflicts
Planning contacts within the environment of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Analysing the project environment · Designing marketing strategies · Planning dissemination activities
Financial and administrative planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Planning costs and resources · Designing contractual arrangements · Devising reporting systems and procedures

Source: Bienzle H. (2001,p.9), "A Survival Kit for European Project Management. Advice for Coordinators of Centralised Socrates Projects. 2nd edition: For projects of selection round 1-3-2001 and later, 2001, Oberwart, www.sokrates.at/survivalkit

Bienzle H. (2001) also underlines that in the pre-starting phase initial staffing structures have to be planned and the project leader must be nominated. The initial structure of national teams must be developed and an allocation of tasks within the teams and within the international project group must also be clearly defined. Bienzle stresses that during the planning phase the detailed and structured plan of work packages is one of the most important issues. The template of the WP should include: name of the work unit, responsible person, content and activities, description of the anticipated outcomes, starting point and deadline, personnel resources – number of working days / hours needed, link to other work units (sequence and overlap).

Equal (2005) stresses that during the initial stage of the project identifying the most appropriate transnational partners is a time-consuming job, especially under the time pressure, but one of the key success factors at the stage of project development. It points out that the continuity of staff from design to dissemination is also very important. Also realistic targets are also very important – in order to make up a set of realistic targets it proposes to use the formula called SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound.

A very interesting input in that context was prepared during the evaluation workshop of Pent@point Transnational Partnership (Equal project) in Joensuu, Finland 14th November 2007. It was delivered by ISAI Consulting – the project's external evaluator (see: www.equal-pentapoint.net). The conclusions of the meeting presented in the PP presentation summing up

the workshop results indicated the following necessary factors for successful initiating, starting and in the latter stage implementation of the transnational project:

- clear reasons for transnational co-operation,
- commitment of partners,
- clear agreements with all partners,
- enough time to do the work,
- enough money,
- resources for any specialist input,
- relevant people involved (specialists and decision makers),
- sufficient time for all phases of the work,
- regular communication with all partners.

On the other hand the following threats were identified:

- changes of key persons in TNP (Trans-National Partnership)
- engagement in work that does not enhance your objectives
- missing timetables and deadlines
- underestimation / overestimation of your partners' abilities.

Special attention during the workshop was paid to the identification of factors crucial for appropriate selection of the partners. In order to find well-matched partners the following important criteria, factors and conditions were identified:

- Be honest. Present yourself and organisation honestly
- Use various sources to check the background of your potential partner
- Choose the language you will use in the TNP, keep to the decision
- Take time to know your partners to make sure you have some common ground between you
- Do not ignore your partners. Get to know their projects and people
- Do not have too many partners

The workshop results stressed the importance of getting to know and understand each other. In that case the following should be taken into account:

- Make sure that all the project leaders communicate in a common language
- Be open for new challenges. To work in a partnership is always a learning forum
- Make study visits to learn about partners activities
- Use different teamwork methods
- People make things/work, not "projects"
- Allow space for people to work differently. Do not demand that everybody works your way.
- Give in, relax, trust your partners, even when it looks like nothing will work
- Do not expect everybody to act like you. Respect cultural differences because it is the salt of transnational cooperation.

ISAI (2007) presentation as Bienzle H. also underlines the critical role of planning. During the planning process of transnational partnerships at the pre-starting phase the following factors should be taken into account:

- Work out in your own project team your objective, resources, commitments
- Check carefully any problem in understanding the basic concepts
- Make the common aims and goals realistic, concrete and clear
- Make the common rules clear and practicable
- Make a detailed and comprehensive plan
- Agree on who does what and by when
- Monitoring and evaluation

The most detailed description of the pre-starting phase of the project is presented in LRDP Ltd.(2003). It identifies two stages of that phase of the project's preparation: project development and establishing partnerships (including the partner search). The most crucial part of the project development phase is defining aims and objectives – it means that when the initial project idea has been identified, a process of development and clarification must take place. That process should define:

- overall objective,
- project aims/goals
- specific actions
- ideas about the role of transnational partners

That process should be lead by an individual who takes the responsibility for coordinating the project (e.g. seek other organisations willing to co-operate on a selected theme, arrange contacts between the partners and keep information and records relating to the project). It stresses that it is helpful, but not essential, for the co-ordinator to have previous transnational co-operation experience.

The process of finding the best partners is complicated and complex. LRDP (2003) indicates the following considerations or questions to be answered during the searching process:

- What kind of partners are we looking for?
 - In these area/s, what kind of partners are being sought? Must they have some specific experience skill or know-how?
 - Are there any other selection criteria: common language? proximity? ability to mobilise certain target groups in their area?
- How many partners?
 - The number of partners in a transnational co-operation project will depend on the type of project envisaged, and the numbers of potential partners identified
- Communication - Do we speak their language?

The role of the first meeting during the preparation phase is also stressed by the LRDP (2003) – like in the case of ISAI (2007). LRDP indicates that the key success factors of the first meeting are:

- concrete and well defined goals:
 - the partners should evaluate their ability to work together,
 - agree on the projects limits in order to avoid disappointments,
 - move on from what was only an idea to a truly joint project;
- the right people should be present:
 - people who are familiar with the technical, financial, commercial and legal components of a project,
 - people who can make commitments on behalf of their area.
- a proper place should be chosen:
 - visits to the partner areas are useful to establish an equal footing between all partners and help visitors better understand the reality of the partner's environment,
 - face-to-face meetings help develop trust and engagement with the project.
- A detailed agenda of the meeting should be prepared – it should contain:
 - presentation of the development project,
 - presentation of each partner's needs and expectations in relation to the project,
 - a list of what each area has to offer in the context of the project,
 - information on each party's experience in transnational co-operation,
 - informal moments to allow for social interaction when partners can get to know each other and have opportunities to discuss awkward matters should be included,

The meeting should end with the drafting of an initial work schedule, with a common timetable and a plan of action. A report of the meeting and its agreements should be compiled and all partners asked to confirm it to avoid misunderstandings.

LRDP (2003) in that context also stresses the importance of common understanding of objectives. All partners should agree in writing on the agreed objectives and partners should be obliged to clarify in writing any misunderstandings.

“Once approved by all parties, the document makes their commitment to the project official; failure to sign it can on the other hand indicate that ambiguities remain”.
(LRDP 2003, p.4)

Additionally, it is common that responsibility for the project's coordination is unevenly distributed. Drawing up the first written agreement, the contribution of each partner in terms of time, money or other resources can be defined for the next time before any further expenses are incurred.

Extensive analysis of the transnational project's evaluation reports (e.g. CASE and KDU 2007, Optimat and Vdivide-it 2005) indicated that there are three key success factors for transnational project implementation: communication, coordination and cultural consideration of the project completion. CASE and KDU (2007) present the results of ongoing evaluation of Equal projects in Poland. Lack of coordination and communication problems were mentioned as the most important barriers in the context of transnational cooperation. A factor called "Different expectations" – which can be associated with inadequate communication as well as not understanding the needs of the foreign partners - was listed in the third place. Optimat and Vdivide-it (2005) report additionally that one of the most important barriers indicated was lack of experience among SMEs in pan-European collaboration.

The next part of this document presents the results of the literature review in the context of the three project implementation key success factors identified above: coordination, communication and cultural consideration.

As regards coordination Bienzle H. (2001) stresses the following tasks (he describes it as organization of the project):

- managing contractual relations with the project partners,
- defining roles,
- building up a project culture,
- forming European and national teams,
- setting up and maintaining a communication system,
- setting up and maintaining an information and reporting system,
- managing critical phases.

Bienzle (2001) underlines a key role of the project coordinator and lists his/her key competences:

- experience of project work,
- knowledge of project management and how to use its tools,
- experience of the content of the project,
- ability to manage complex structures and situations,
- communication skills: moderation and presentation, ability to facilitate constructive and effective communication within the project and the social environment of the project, an understanding of the social processes within a project,
- leadership ability: leading teams, motivation of people, organising and developing processes, dynamic approach to implementation and completion of tasks,
- ability to cope with pressure: pressure of time, resistance inside or outside the project organization.

Also EQUAL (2005) lists the key characteristics of the coordinator. Comparing to Bienzle it adds the following factors:

- some prior experience of transnational cooperation;
- sensitivity to cultural differences, especially those between the countries in the partnership;
- negotiation skills;
- commitment to transnational work.

Finally Bienzle (2001) stresses the following features characterizing effective project teams:

- have clear and common goals;
- share responsibility for those goals among team members;
- measure their progress towards the goals;
- are fairly small;
- have the necessary blend of skills and roles (technical, problem solving and interpersonal);
- have the resources needed to do the job;
- get support from their superiors;
- have agreed on basic rules for working together;
- have allocated appropriate roles and tasks to each member;
- have developed and agreed on practices and processes to get things done;
- support each other by listening, responding constructively and helpfully;
- recognise individual and team success;
- handle conflicts constructively and openly;
- produce a collective output which achieves the set goals;
- use time to know the members in the team;
- use time to understand cultural diversity;
- reflect frequently their working style and on all of the above factors.

A very important element of a good coordination process is the ability to manage a project team. The document prepared by ISAI Consulting (basing on the Loden M. And Rosner J.: Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource 1991). ISAI (2007) lists also the crucial factors to successfully coordinate work plan implementation. These are:

- keep your promises; do tasks on time;
- keep agreements and timetable;
- the sooner your partnership defines the division of tasks and the criteria for measuring the success the better for the rest of the project;
- agree on tools and methods to be used and use them;
- do not hesitate to ask if you do not get agreed results, reports etc.

LRDP (2003) in that context stresses the importance (as well as Bienzle H.) of reporting, monitoring and evaluating activities:



- *reporting* - an operating report compiled at set intervals enables coordinators to check on how the different aspects of the project are proceeding. It can include the following information: components of the project and the stages of its development, actions to be carried out at each stage, and for each action, the responsible person or organisation, the result expected and the timetable of completion, and indicators to enable monitoring and evaluation.
- *monitoring* - based on the agreed objectives, the project coordinator should ensure that regular monitoring information is collected from partners and disseminated to all partners highlighting: main elements of the project and development stages, progress towards the actions to be carried out at each stage, what will happen if partners do not reach the agreed steps, milestones should be identified to show where partners are in relation to their goal; it would be desirable for partners to meet at regular intervals in the countries concerned, to consider the monitoring reports and review progress.
- *evaluating the project* - the ongoing evaluation of a transnational cooperation project can help reach the project goals in the following ways: it can be a tool for steering the project, allowing adjustments to be made to it as necessary so that the objectives can be better achieved, can help project workers have confidence in their work by affirming it or identifying problems before they become serious, capitalise on the project's lessons for future transnational projects, identify the added value of the transnational element.

Equal (2005) presents four types of organizational (project coordination) model:

- *designation of one transnational coordinator* (Hub and Spoke Model): one partner is selected by the others and agrees to take responsibility for the overall management and co-ordination of the transnational work programme;
- *rotating or shared co-ordination* (Consortium Model): each partner in turn takes responsibility for the management and co-ordination of a phase (or transnational meeting) or for a segment (tasks) of the work programme according to pre-agreed definitions;
- *steering committee*: the partners establish a small steering committee on which each partner is represented and the committee assumes overall joint responsibility for the management and coordination of the transnational activities. The chairmanship may rotate from one meeting to the next. It may be appropriate to employ/engage a suitable external expert to support the committee;
- *working groups*: it may be useful to establish work groups with responsibilities for managing and coordinating specific segments of the work programme and their associated tasks, to look more deeply into particular issues, and to take better advantage of specific expertise among the partners.

Despite the fact that communication is one of the most important success factors, the available literature does not pay too much attention to this issue.

Bienzle H. (2001) states that specific nature of European cooperation projects has implications for their communication systems:

- the long distances involved require a good format for the communication system and agreement on clear rules concerning its use;
- messages must be exact because of different cultures and languages;
- the pressure to keep in contact must be seen against the background that the project is only a (small) part of the team members' workload;

Bienzle H. (2001) also indicates that the ability to create good communications within the team is one of the key skills, together with leadership, required in a competent project coordinator. He lists several ways of communication:

- project meetings,
- bilateral or transnational visits,
- formal presentations,
- reports, memos and notes,
- faxed messages,
- mailed letters,
- telephone calls,
- voice mails,
- e-mails.
- video conference,
- virtual tools for collaborative project,

He also indicates that the communication system itself based on the use of new technologies is of no intrinsic value. It is an important task for the coordinator (with perhaps some assistance from the IT expert) to reflect on how the technological element of the communication system might be useful to the project:

- e-mail will probably be used for regular, daily communication and sending messages;
- establishing an intranet on a project web site might be helpful for working together on a specific task in a virtual working environment;
- video or telephone conferences can help to intensify the transnational team work between steering group meetings or between team members who do not travel regularly.

Equal (2005) specially stresses the importance of communication and as a result an ensuring an affective communication. It points out the following issues:

- between meetings, ensure an ongoing flow of information to and from transnational partners;
- if possible, set up a communication network between all stakeholders in a developing transnational cooperation, notably those that have to make relevant contributions, such as an e-mail group, a newsletter, a regularly updated website, or an intranet facility;
- confirm all decisions clearly in writing - not all people may have understood the same by what has been said, and communication styles differ between people and cultures; this is not only true for communication between representatives of transnational partners;

- eventually, commitments and agreements should be expressed in plain words, not in diplomatic language; as regards follow-up activities, state clearly who has agreed to do what and by when in writing.

Equal (2005) underlines that even a good command of English (or another common language) does not necessarily protect against misunderstandings. The same content may be understood differently in the different national contexts. It can be helpful to look at this carefully as work is established. This also means that the use of, for example, interpreters can only solve part of the language problem.

A *cultural consideration* is the next analyzed factor. However, despite identifying the cultural consideration as an important factor for successful project implementation, almost all the analyzed educational guides did not develop that issue. Thus the literature review in that stage focused on desk research of the literature, which is far beyond the typical educational guides about project management. The literature review summary in that stage should be started by citing Geert Hofstede's theory (1991, 2001). He analyzed cultures along five dimensions:

- *Low vs. High Power Distance* - the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Low power distance (e.g. [Austria](#), [Israel](#), [Denmark](#), [New Zealand](#)) expect and accept power relations that are more consultative or democratic. People relate to each others more as equals regardless of formal positions. Subordinates are more comfortable with and demand the right to contribute to and critique the decision making of those in power. In High power distance countries (e.g. [Malaysia](#), [Slovakia](#)) the less powerful accept power relations that are more autocratic and paternalistic. High Power Distance cultures usually have centralized, top-down control. Low power distance implies greater equality and empowerment. In Europe, Power Distance tends to be lower in Northern countries and higher in Southern and Eastern regions.
- *Individualism vs. collectivism* - in an individual environment the individual persons and their rights are more important than the needs and rights of the group that they may belong to. In a collective environment, people are born into strong extended family or tribal communities, and these loyalties are paramount. Latin American cultures rank among the most collectivist in this category, while Western countries such as the [U.S.A.](#), [Great Britain](#) and [Australia](#) are the most individualistic cultures.
- *Masculinity vs. femininity* - refers to the value placed traditionally on male or female values. So-called 'masculine' cultures value competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, and the accumulation of wealth and material possessions, whereas feminine cultures place more value on relationships and quality of life. [Japan](#) is considered by Hofstede to be the most "masculine" culture (replaced by [Slovakia](#) in a later study), [Sweden](#) the most "feminine." In 'masculine' cultures, the differences between gender roles are more dramatic and less fluid than in 'feminine' cultures.
- *Uncertainty avoidance* - reflects the extent to which members of a society attempt to cope with anxiety by minimizing uncertainty. Cultures that scored high in uncertainty

avoidance prefer rules and structured circumstances, and employees tend to remain longer with their present employer. [Mediterranean](#) cultures, [Latin America](#), and [Japan](#) rank the highest in this category.

- *Long vs. short term orientation* - describes a society's "time horizon," or the importance attached to the future versus the past and present. In long-term oriented societies, values include persistence, ordering relationships by status, thrift, and having a sense of shame. In short-term oriented societies, values include normative statements, personal steadiness and stability, protecting one's image, respect for tradition, and [reciprocation](#) of greetings, favors, and gifts. China, Japan and the Asian countries score especially high (long-term) here, with Western nations scoring rather low (short-term).

Fons Trompenaars also developed his model of culture. However, he considers seven dimensions – Trompenaars F. (1998). These are:

1. *Universalism versus Particularism* - people in universalistic cultures share the belief that general rules, codes, values and standards take precedence over particular needs and claims of friends and relations. In a universalistic society, the rules apply equally to the whole "universe" of members. Any exception weakens the rule. Particularistic cultures see the ideal culture in terms of human friendship, extraordinary achievement and situations; and in intimate relationships. The "spirit of the law" is deemed more important than the "letter of the law".
2. *Individualism versus Collectivism (Communitarism)* - in a predominantly individualistic culture people place the individual before the community. Individual happiness, fulfillment, and welfare set the pace. People are expected to decide matters largely on their own and to take care primarily of themselves and their immediate family. In a particularistic culture, the quality of life for all members of society is seen as directly dependent on opportunities for individual freedom and development. The community is judged by the extent to which it serves the interest of individual members. In a predominantly communitarian culture, people place the community before the individual. It is the responsibility of the individual to serve the society.
3. *Neutral versus Affective* - in an affective culture people have no problem with showing and sharing their emotions. Affective cultures may interpret the less explicit signals of a neutral culture as less important. They may be ignored or even go unnoticed. In a neutral culture people are taught that it is incorrect to show one's feelings overtly. This doesn't mean they do not have feelings, it just means that the degree to which feelings can be manifested is limited. Representatives of neutral cultures may think that the louder signals of an affective culture are overemotional.
4. *Specific versus Diffuse* - people from specific cultures start with the elements, the specifics. First they analyze them separately, and then they put them back together again. In specific cultures, the whole is the sum of its parts. Each person's life is divided into many components: you can only enter one at a time. Interactions



between people are highly purposeful and well-defined. The public sphere of specific individuals is much larger than their private sphere. People are easily accepted into the public sphere, but it is very difficult to get into the private sphere. Specific individuals concentrate on hard facts, standards, contracts.

People from diffusely oriented cultures see each element from the wider perspective. All elements are relating to each other. These relationships are more important than each separate element; so the whole is more than just the sum of its elements. Diffuse individuals have a large private sphere and a small public one. Newcomers are not easily accepted. But once they have been accepted, they are admitted into all layers of the individual's life. A friend is a friend in all respects: tennis, cooking, work, etc. The various roles someone might play in your life are not separated.

5. *Achievement versus Ascription* - in achievement-oriented cultures, individuals derive their status from what they have accomplished. A person with achieved status has to prove what he is worth over and over again: status is granted according to his/her activities and accomplishments. Ascribed status refers to who a person is and it what way the others perceive his or her position in the community, in society or in an organization. In an ascriptive society, individuals derive their status from birth, age, gender or wealth.
6. *Sequential versus Synchronic* - every culture has developed its own response to time. The dimension of time orientation has two aspects: the relative importance cultures place on the past, present, and future, and their approach to structuring time. Time can be structured in two ways. In one approach time moves forward, second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour in a straight line. This is called sequentialism. In another approach time moves round in cycles: of minutes, hours, days, years. We call this synchronism.

People structuring time sequentially tend to do one thing at a time. They view time as a narrow line of distinct, consecutive segments. Sequential people view time as tangible and divisible. They strongly prefer planning and keeping to plans once they have been made. Time commitments are taken seriously. People structuring time synchronically usually do several things at a time. To them, time is a wide ribbon, allowing many things to take place simultaneously. Time is flexible and intangible. Time commitments are desirable rather than absolute. Plans can be easily changed. Synchronic people especially value the satisfactory completion of interactions with others. Promptness depends on the type of relationship

7. *Internal versus External Control* - every culture has developed an attitude towards the natural environment. Survival has meant acting with or against nature. The way we relate to our environment is linked to the way we seek to have control over our own lives and over our destiny or fate.

Internalistic people have a mechanistic view of nature. They see nature as a complex machine and machines can be controlled if you have the right expertise. Internalistic people do not believe in luck or predestination. They are 'inner-directed' - one's



personal resolution is the starting point for every action. You can live the life you want to live if you take advantage of the opportunities. Man can dominate nature - if he/she makes the effort. Externalistic people have a more organic view of nature. Mankind is one of nature's forces, and so should operate in harmony with the environment. Man should subjugate to nature and go along with its forces. Externalistic people do not believe that they can shape their own destiny. 'Nature moves in mysterious ways', and therefore you never know what will happen to you. The actions of externalistic people are 'outer-directed' - adapted to external circumstances.

Looking at the cultural considerations in the context of communication it is worth presenting Edward Hall's contextual model. Hall (1981) observed that the way different cultures define and organize space can lead to serious failures of communication. In a *low-context culture*, very little is taken for granted. It means that more explanation is needed and there is less chance of misunderstanding particularly during the communication process with outsiders. In a *high-context culture*, there are many contextual elements that help people to understand the rules. As a result, much is taken for granted. This can be very confusing for a person who does not understand the 'unwritten rules' of the culture.

Hall attributed specific countries to one of these two categories. The table below shows the various dimensions related to business and the differences between low-context and high-context cultures.

Table

	Low-Context	High-Context
Example Countries	US, UK, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Norway	Japan, China, Egypt, Saudi, Arabia, France, Italy, Spain
Business Outlook	Competitive	Cooperative
Work Ethic	Task-oriented	Relationship-oriented
Work Style	Individualistic	Team-oriented
Employee Desires	Individual achievement	Team achievement
Relationships	Many, looser, short-term	Fewer, tighter, long-term
Decision Process	Logical, linear, rule-oriented	Intuitive, relational
Communication	Verbal over Non-verbal	Non-verbal over Verbal
Planning	More explicit, written, formal	More implicit, oral, informal
Horizons		
Sense of Time	Present/Future-oriented	Deep respect for the past
View of Change	Change over tradition	Tradition over change
Knowledge	Explicit, conscious	Implicit, not fully conscious
Learning	Knowledge is transferable (above the waterline)	Knowledge is situational (below the waterline)

Source: Beaman K, (2008, p.40) "The New Multi-Dimensional Talent Force: Multi-Cultural Differences" *IHRIM Journal*, Volume XII, Number 3, http://www.jeitosa.com/content_attachments/11/2008VolXIINo3_Beaman_-_MultiDimensional_Talentforce_-_MultiCultural_Differences.pdf

Equal (2005) lists a number of recommendations on how to overcome cultural differences:

- be open-minded; accept that there are other ways of working; be patient;
- try to obtain information about your partner's country and culture beforehand, and not only during meetings; sources of information include: the web, public libraries, institutions like the British Council, Goethe Institut, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Alliance Française, international Chambers of Commerce;
- do not just rely on written communication; engage in the discussion culture; do not use a stopwatch for timekeeping; be sensitive to formal and informal cultures in other member states;
- agree on a common partnership language - this may often be English, but take into account that French may be the first foreign language of some Southern European partners;
- ensure you have sufficient language capacity in-house;
- discuss with your partners exactly what you mean by certain concepts; make a glossary of terms, or use graphics and drawings as this avoids misunderstanding at a later stage;
- when chairing a meeting, make sure that everybody understands and can follow the discussion; regularly summarise what has been said and check understanding; write main headings on flipcharts; make sure that everybody has the chance and adequate time to express their opinion;
- never underestimate the importance and influence of language, especially if it is not your own;
- clarify what power partners have to take decisions concerning the partnership and its meetings;
- explain the culture of your organisation to your partners and try to find out about theirs;
- do not be afraid to speak in meetings and to express your doubts when appropriate; remember that meetings are the most direct way to clarify your goals and to explore differences of opinion; this avoids frustration afterwards;
- explain the strengths of your DP and country.

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