

The Nature of Cultural Conflicts  
in European Project Teams:  
A Cultural Study

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DISSERTATION

*International Project Management*  
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## PREFACE

This dissertation was performed at Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden (Gothenburg), which was included in a Master of Science program entitled International Project Management in collaboration with Northumbria University in United Kingdom (Newcastle). This dissertation is equal to 20 Swedish university credit points which corresponds 60 CAT points.

The dissertation has been focusing on the Nature of Cultural Conflicts within European Project Teams at six world leading organisations within Europe.

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## ABSTRACT

The fast development of today's technology forces the organisations to use multi-cultural co-operations such as project teams, to bring richer and more appropriate solutions. The differences in cultural background between the project team members may sometimes be an obstacle which therefore causes conflicts concerning national issues. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine if there are any typical conflicts that arise within multi-cultural project teams that only consist of European project team members. The scope of this research is to obtain the project managers experiences concerning the occurrence of typical conflicts within their European project teams. The methods used in this report are course literature, literature reviews, articles and empirical research. The empirical research was based on semi-structured interviews with six project managers that have been or still are leading project teams within world leading organisations that generally consist of European project team members. The result indicates that there are significant differences between the participating project managers' experiences and earlier studies concerning the occurrence of conflicts regarding national issues. The differences in national issues between the different cultures cause some interpersonal conflicts within European project teams, but compared with project teams consisting members from different parts of the world the occurrence of conflicts is less common.

### *Keywords*

Project teams

Conflict

Interpersonal conflict

Culture

National culture

Multi-cultural project teams

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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The following chapter will give the reader a short overview of the occurrence of conflicts within multi-cultural project teams and a background of the investigation. Furthermore, this chapter aims to present the purpose, objectives and the delimitations of the study. Finally, the research structure of this dissertation will be presented.

## 1.1 Background

This dissertation presents an empirical analysis of project managers understanding regarding conflicts that occur within multi-cultural project teams that involves project team members that originates from European countries. The study was carried out in collaboration with project managers working in world leading organisations within European countries.

During the last decades, the use of project teams has rapidly spread across industries, nonprofits and national boundaries (Beyerlein, 2001). A project team is in general a work group of two or more individuals who must cooperate and work interdependently with each other to achieve project objectives. The rapid changes in the technology, complex task environments, and interpersonal dynamics, are the reasons for the creation of project teams. This because, the individuals that are involved in the same project team, obtains the opportunity to share common skills and objectives of each project team member. All the project team members enclose different backgrounds of functional areas where they hopefully complement and fit with the other project team members when they start co-operating (Verma, 1997). The establishments of the global economy and the increased competitiveness among the global organisations have increased the number of people criss-crossing cultural boundaries and having to deal with a complex and different workplace (Brew & Cairns, 2004). Davison (1994) declare that international project teams are one way for organisations to reorganise and to compete in the global marketplace (Davison, 1994).

Conflict is a natural part of the daily activities of any workplace, but when people from different cultural background are cooperating, problems beyond the typical tensions may arise (Brew & Cairns, 2004). According to Esquivel and Kleiner (1997), a conflict is usually a disagreement regarding interests or ideas, which can occur within oneself, between two or more people, within an organisation, or between two or more organisations. The consequences of the interpersonal interaction within multi-cultural project teams are more complex than project teams of one nationality. This is due to the different background of expertise, knowledge and above all the different cultural background which the project team members originate from (Davison, 1994). Misunderstandings occur very easy in multi-cultural project teams, for the reason that people from different cultural backgrounds think different, act different and behave different (Appelbaum, Elbaz & Shapiro, 1998). According to Jehn and Chatman (2000), conflict is inescapable in any working environment, and especially with people who are culturally different and of different nationalities. It is an observable fact that appears no matter how good a project team is managed, certainly because people are different and think differently (Chatman & Jehn, 2000).

Earlier studies have analysed typical conflicts that occurs within multi-cultural project teams where the project team members originates from all part of the world. A quantity of studies have analysed the cultural differences between project team members that originates from two or more continents or even two or more countries from the same continent. Unlike other examinations, this dissertation emphasis on project teams that consist of project team member that originates merely from countries within Europe. Regarding the investigation of conflicts within multi-cultural project teams, national culture is the most interesting issue for the author of this study to examine. Moreover, the way the project team members' act, behave, and their manner of thinking and feeling, which are all a part of the individual's cultural background. Other issues such as religion, values and attitudes, traditions, language, way of communication, actions and the aspect of time are all included as national culture (Burgess & Enhassi, 1990; Schneider, 1995; Verma, 1997). The target group will be project managers that work or collaborate with Swedish organisations that manage multi-cultural project teams within Europe.

## 1.2 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine why conflicts within multi-cultural project teams occur, more specifically to find out if there are any typical conflicts that arise within multi-cultural environments. An empirical research has been made on how European project managers experience the occurrence of conflicts within multi-cultural project teams within Europe.

The objectives, which are set to complete the purpose above, are:

1. To study the aspects of conflicts within European multi-cultural project teams by means of an empirical research.
2. To identify issues that contributes to conflict within multi-cultural project teams.
3. To compare identified differences with previous research.

### 1.2.1 Problem Statement

Based on the authors own thoughts, her aim is to answer the following questions in the theoretical framework:

- What is conflict?
  - What is the fundamental definition of the word conflict?
  - What are the functional and dysfunction outcomes of conflict?
  - What are the different levels of conflict?
- What are the typical conflicts that occur in project teams?
- What is culture?
  - What is the fundamental definition of the word culture?
  - What are the different levels of culture?
- What are the typical conflicts that occur within multi-cultural project teams?

## 1.5 Delimitation

This study is limited to twenty weeks of investigation and work, which therefore limit the research of this dissertation. The author of this dissertation has therefore decided to find out if there are any typical conflicts that occur within multi-cultural project teams. Conflict can be studied from many different aspects and with different fundamental values. Dissertations with similar studies may therefore have different result and conclusions. This dissertation focuses on interpersonal conflicts, i.e., conflicts that occur between two or more individuals within a project team or an organisation. The word culture submits to several different aspects like gender, nationality, regional, generation, and organisational culture (Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005; Hofstede, 1991; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, referred to by Bodley, 1994). The main task of this study is to focus on national-culture, which include the different aspects regarding language, attitudes, traditions, values, religion, the aspect of time and way of communication. This dissertation comprehends the work environment within multi-cultural project teams in Swedish organisations that either work or collaborate with other organisations from different parts of Europe. The part of the interviews has focused on project managers with European background that works for organisations with worldwide market. The target group is project team members that originate from merely European countries.

## 1.6 Dissertation Structure Overview

The author of this dissertation started with selecting a subject for this study. The next process was to choose the method for the empirical research and perform the theoretical framework. The approaches used in the empirical research are based on the theoretical framework, which will be further explained in the method part. When the theoretical framework and the empirical research were totally completed the result was conducted, thereafter these sections were analysed and the part of the discussion commenced. The concluding step of this dissertation is the conclusion. The following figure (Figure 1) illustrates the structure of this dissertation.

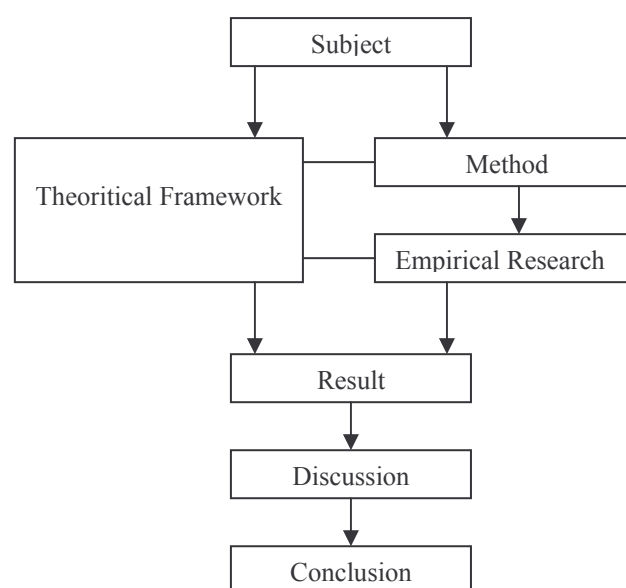


Figure 1, The structure of the dissertation.

This dissertation has been divided into six different parts, which are called introduction, theoretical framework, method, result, discussion and conclusion. The introduction part consists of the background, purpose and objectives, the delimitations and the structure of the dissertation. The theoretical framework is based on information from books, articles and internet. The theoretical framework of this dissertation will be used as a base for the investigation and aims to bring awareness and understanding of the subject to the reader. The method part presents the method that has been used in this dissertation, the process of gathering the primary and the secondary data, and the participants used in the chosen method. The part that is called the result summarises the answers from the interviews, and deliver the results of the interviews. In the part of discussion, comparisons and evaluations were made between the results from the empirical research and the theoretical framework. At last, in the part of conclusion inferences has been drawn from the accomplished study.

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## 2. FRAME OF REFERENCE

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The purpose of the following chapter is to provide a theoretical framework of conflicts that occur within multi-cultural project teams. The objective is to provide a deeper understanding of conflicts that occur in multi-cultural project teams concerning national issues.

### 2.1 Project Team Overview

During the last decades, the organisations have increased the use of project teams to achieve their objectives. The use of project teams by international organisations has also increased rapidly during the last years (Mantle & Meredith, 2003). The Project Management Institute (2004, p 5.) defines a project team as “*A temporary endeavour to create a unique product or service*”. According to Clifford and Larson (2000, p. 4), “*A project is a complex, nonroutine, one-time effort limited by time, budget, resources, and performance specifications designed to meet customer needs.*” Clement and Gido (1999, p. 4) defines a project as “*an endeavour to accomplish a specific objective through a unique set of interrelated tasks and the effective utilization of resources.*” There are many definitions of what a project team is, but the essence of its meaning is very the same.

According to Hacker (2000), the formation of project teams is a common response to the highly competitive and global marketplace. Project teams enable multiple perspectives, a range of experiences, and a broad skill set to be brought to tolerate on project teams. The use of project teams is increasingly being considered a necessity, as project team’s increase in complexity (Hacker, 2000). Briner, Geddes and Hastings (2002) assumes that organisations use project teams to stimulate the collaboration between commitments across the organisation. The project teams are being created to bring together individuals from different background of expertise. They also argue that project teams vary in duration, scale and complexity (Briner, Geddes and Hastings, 2002). Mantel et al. (2001) also argues that most of the project teams vary widely in both size and type, but they all have the same characteristics. Every project team is unique, specific, and has desired completion dates in its own way. Moreover, project teams are composed of tasks, which can be further divided into subtasks with the intention of brake it down further more. The purpose of these subdivisions is to allow the project team to view at a variety levels of details. Project teams are with other words subdivisions of programs. Project teams are formed in order to fix the responsibility and authority for the achievement of the organisational goal with help from an individual or a small group when the job does not clearly fall within the definition of routine work (Mantel et al., 2001).

According to Mantel et al. (2001), most of the project teams are multidisciplinary, which means that they all have the need of effort from people with different kinds of expertise and knowledge. This multidisciplinary character of project teams can become very complex, for the reason that it gathers a collection of many interconnected elements and at the same time require effort from groups outside the project teams. To manage select a successful project team, specialists have to investigate the problem to discover what skills, information, and

knowledge is needed to accomplish the overall task before gathering the working project team. This procedure may take weeks, months, or even years to find the correct efforts and understand how they fit together. Moreover, project teams do not exist in isolation; they are often parts of larger entity or program (Mantel et al., 2001).

According to Cleland (1999), disagreements, controversy and misunderstandings develop among the people that are working together. In project teams that are composed by people with different specialist skills, the occurrence of conflict becomes a usual outcome. Mantel et al. (2001) declares that conflict is a resulting effect of using multidisciplinary teams to deal with complex problems. Conflict is very common among project teams and is one issue that characterises project teams. According to Mantel et al. (2001), a quantity of the most intractable and intense conflicts are those between the team members of the project team. Furthermore, conflicts and project teams seem to be inseparable companions (Mantel et al., 2001).

## 2.2 Conflict

Lee (2002) states that about 24 percent of the manager's time is spend on handling conflicts. Therefore, it becomes important to have good knowledge about what conflict is and how it can be effectively managed. Even though, there are many definitions of the word conflict, the essence of its meaning is the same. Table 1 illustrates some of the different formulations of the word conflict.

Definition of Conflict	Source
<i>“An interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc.)”</i>	(Rahim, 2001, p.18.)
<i>“A clash or struggle that occurs when a real or perceived threat or difference exists in the desires, thoughts, attitudes, feelings and behaviour of two or more parties.”</i>	(Cox, 2003)
<i>“A situation in which two or more individuals operating within a unit appear to be incompatible.”</i>	(Darling and Walker, 2001)
<i>“Conflict is an awareness by employees involved in the conflict that discrepancies, or incompatible wishes or desires, exist among them.”</i>	(Chatman & Jehn, 2000, pp. 56-57)
<i>“Perceived incompatibilities or perceptions by the parties involved that they hold discrepant views or have interpersonal incompatibilities.”</i>	(Jehn, 1995, p. 257)

Table 1, Definitions of conflict.

Darling and Walker (2001) proclaim that conflicts within an organisation are inevitable, whether or not it is wanted; this phenomenon exists to a greater or less degree. According to Fritchie and Leary (1998), conflicts occur within all organisations and everywhere else. Some conflicts are insignificant, while some are painful and destroy a lot for the organisation. A conflict can create bad influence on the moral, communication and the productivity of the organisation and also between or within the management group and the employers (Fritchie & Leary, 1998). Smith (2005) states, that a conflict is an important human interaction and occurs between or within people, groups, organisations and nations. He also declares that without conflicts, it is not possible to gain a solution and/or an answer to a problem and/or a question. According to Mantel and Meredith (2003), conflicts often occur when people with different ideas about how to achieve project objectives work in the same project team. According to Rahim (2001), a conflict is expected among human beings and he declares that conflicts arise;

*“When two or more social entities (i.e., individuals, groups, organisations, and nations) come in contact with one another in attaining their objectives, their relationships may become incompatible or inconsistent.”* (Rahim, 2001, pp. 1)

The relationship among those entities may become inconsistent when they have different values, attitudes, skills and believes, have partly select behaviour preferences regarding their common action. Furthermore, when two or more of them want a similar resource when it is in short supply (Rahim, 2001).

According to McKenna (1995), a conflict arises when wants, needs and values of two parties interfere with each other. Depending on how the parties react to the present conflict it may not be a damaging situation for the project team or the organisation and instead present opportunities for situations to be driven forward effectively (McKenna, 1995).

### 2.2.1 Positive and Negative Consequences of Conflict

The relationship between the team members within a project team can often be very competitive among those with different positions (Edelmann, 1993). According to Edelmann (1993), a competitive approach between the team members of a project team bring forward to the contribution of conflicts. Many researchers' (Edelmann, 1993, Ohbuchi & Suzuki, 2003 & Rahim, 2001) argue that most of the people react very negative when it comes to conflict, while conflict not always is a negative thing for either a project team or an organisation. Edelmann (1993) argues that conflict does not always have to be a bad thing; conflict can instead contribute to among other things personal improvements (Edelmann, 1993). According to Ohbuchi and Suzuki (2003), people usually vision conflict as harmful because it may bring hostility and mistrust among the project team members or among the employees within an organisation. Conflict may also cause interferes with the project team or with the organisational performance, and in the extreme cases, cause a breakdown on project teams or organisations (Ohbuchi & Suzuki, 2003). Rahim (2001) believes as well as Edelmann (1993) that conflicts within a project team or an organisation do not always have to be bad; a conflict can have both negative and positive consequences. A conflict can have beneficial outcomes for a project team or an organisation and not just useless outcomes. The two differing viewpoints on the result of a conflict are; dysfunctional outcomes and functional outcomes (Rahim, 2001).



The functional outcomes of a conflict are:

- Improve the decision-making within the organisation.
- Alternative solutions to a problem may be found.
- People may be forced to search for new approaches.
- Conflict may lead to synergistic solution to common problems.
- People may be required to articulate and clarify their positions.
- Conflict may stimulate innovation, creativity and growth.

The dysfunctional outcomes of a conflict are:

- Conflict may cause stress and job burnout.
- Communication between employees may be reduced.
- A climate of distrust and suspicion can be developed.
- Relationships may be damaged.
- Job satisfaction and performance may be reduced.
- Resistance to change can increase.
- Organisational commitment and loyalty may be affected.

According to Rahim (2001), it is of importance to try to diminish the negative effects of conflicts, particularly if the social system within the organisation or the project team will benefit from it. Instead he believes that increasing the positive effects of conflicts will be more beneficial for the organisation.

This dissertation mainly focuses on conflicts within European multi-cultural project teams, from the project managers' point of view. The author of this dissertation is interested in further investigation concerning the participating project managers different opinions regarding the different aspects of functional and dysfunctional outcomes of conflicts compared with Rahim.

## 2.2.2 Different Levels of Conflicts

According to Rahim (1992), there are different levels of conflicts. Organisational conflicts can be classified as intra-organisational (conflicts within an organisation) or inter-organisational (conflicts between two or more organisations). The intra-organisational conflict can be classified as intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup. These different levels of conflicts are described below.

*Intrapersonal conflict* is a conflict that occurs within the person, i.e. when he or she need to carry out certain tasks and roles that do not match his or her expertise, interest, goals and values (Rahim, 1992). Cox (2003) defines intrapersonal conflict as a conflict that lies within an individual that is trying to make sense out of contradictory values.

*Interpersonal conflict* is a conflict that occurs between two or more individuals within a project team or an organisation of the same or different hierarchical levels or units (Rahim, 1992).

*Intragroup conflict* is a conflict that occurs among the members of a group or an organisation, or between two or more subgroups within a group in relation with its goals, tasks, process and so forth (Rahim, 1992).

*Intergroup conflict* is a conflict that occurs between two or more groups within a project team or an organisation. Examples of this kind of conflict can occur between staff and line, marketing and production, and field staff and headquarters (Rahim, 1992). According to Cox (2003), intergroup conflict is when disagreements arise with regard to e.g. tasks, goals and functions of the group.

This dissertation will investigate the occurrence of conflicts within project teams that merely consist of European project team members, more particularly the occurrence of conflicts from the project manager's point of view. The interpersonal conflict is the level that the author of this dissertation is interested in for further investigation.

### 2.2.3 Conflicts within Projects

Most of the literature that the author of this dissertation has found focuses on conflicts within organisations. Despite that, this literature can also be used in most of the cases for analysis of project teams. This since, people that are working in a project team are members of a group who are working towards the same goal, as well as the employees who are working for an organisation (Rahim, 1992).

According to Boddy (2002), project teams have a life cycle that includes four phases; the definition phase, the planning phase, the implementation phase and the phase out (finishing phase). The project life cycle defines the start and the end of a project team and a range of objectives within it (Newell, 2002). Kerzner (2001) declares that each conflict can imply a different comparative intensity over the project life cycle. Thamhain and Wilemon (1975) claims that conflicts arise due to the different conflict sources depending on what phase the project team is in. Orr (2004) clarifies that every project team can adopt their own project life cycle and decides the number of phases. According to Mantle and Meredith (2003), conflicts are easily achieved throughout the planning phase of a project team, since this phase generally involves interaction of many people with different skills and background where they for the first time settle down with each other. Thamhain and Wilemon (1975) on the other hand believe that conflicts occur due to the various sources depending on what phase the project team is in. The seven sources that are examined are;

- *Conflict over project team priorities* – the view of the project team members may differ over the succession of activities and tasks, which should be carried out to attain successful project team achievement. This type of conflict may occur between project team and other support group and within the project team.
- *Conflict over administrative procedure* – this type of conflict may be developed over how the project team will be managed; i.e., the definition of the project manager's reporting relationships, definition of responsibilities, project team scope, interface relationships, procedure for administrative support, and so forth.
- *Conflict over technical opinions* – different opinions may occur over performance specifications, technical issues, technical exchange and the means to achieve performance.
- *Conflict over manpower resource* – may occur around members of the project team with employees from other specialized and staff support areas.
- *Conflict over cost* – often increase over cost estimates from support areas concerning a range of project work breakdown packages. For instance, the capitals that are

distributed by the project manager to a functional group might be apprehended as inadequate for the request of the group.

- *Conflict over schedules* – different opinions may arise around the timing, scheduling of project team related tasks etc.
- *Personality conflict* – different opinions may arise between two or more project team members rather than on “technical” issues (Thamhain & Wilemon, 1975).

The intensity of each conflict source is over the entire project life cycle and is presented in Figure 2, where M is the comparative intensity of conflict apparent by project managers, measured on four-point scale. According to Thamhain and Wilemon (1975), Figure 2 indicates that conflict over schedules result in the most intense conflicts over the total project team. Conflict over priorities is the second type of conflict that occurs very often within project teams and conflict over manpower is the third type that also occurs frequently.

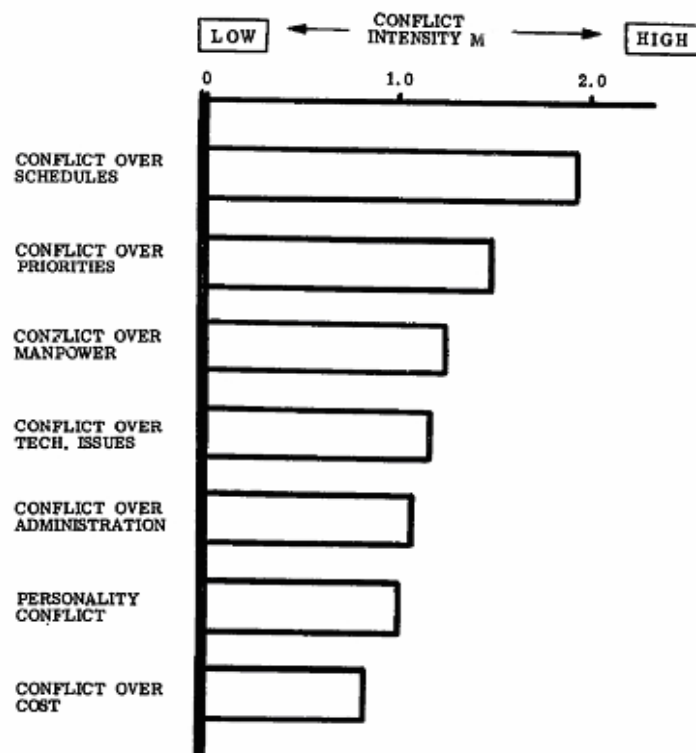


Figure 2, The intensity of conflict sources during the project life cycle (Thamhain and Wilemon, 1975, p. 35).

Thamhain and Wilemon (1975) recommend that careful planning should be done before starting a project team in order to minimize detrimental conflicts.

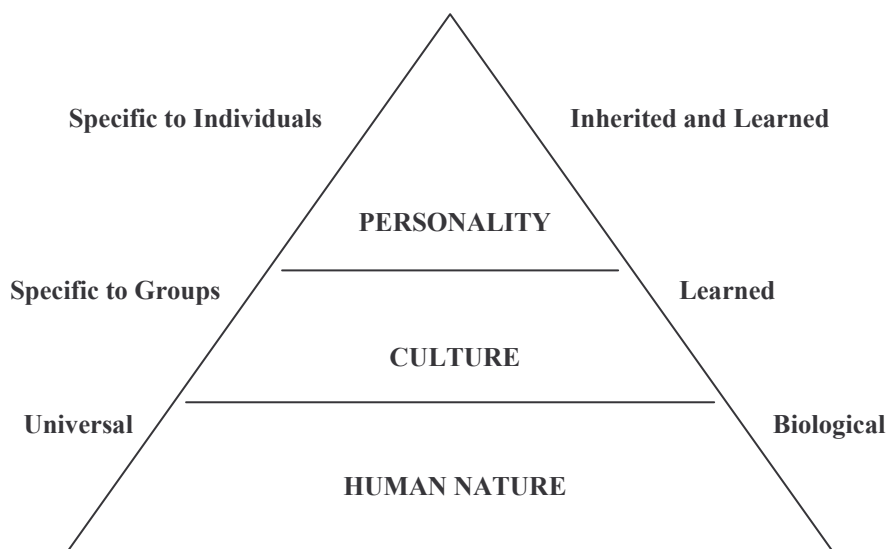
According to Richard and Sayed (1996), the increased use of project teams where the team members are from different countries is a main reason for the occurrence of conflicts within a project team. The differentiation between the numbers of cultures that are involved within a project team causes a lot of misunderstandings between the project team members. The misunderstandings arise from the different views that the project team members have regarding religion, values, attitudes, language, traditions, and norms and so forth. Each culture separates itself from other cultures by specific resolutions it chooses to certain problems and how it approaches these problems (Richard & Sayed, 1996).

## 2.3 Culture

The word culture has many meanings and cannot be reduced to a few phrases (Calero, 2005). According to Calero (2005), culture is a system of shared and learned behaviours that arises from the process of living with individuals in a common environment. Verma (1997) declares that culture represents the characteristic way in which a group of people is related by geography, ethnicity, religious, or some other united principles that lead their lives. It submits to a generally shared set of beliefs, values, knowledge and attitudes. The creation of a culture depends both on the people and the environment, which can be transmitted from one generation to the next through family, social environment, school and other agencies. It is difficult to define culture and it is a complex subject because of its several elements and dimensions. Verma (1997) present some key characteristics of culture:

- Culture is acquired by learning and experience.
- Groups, organisations and societies share cultures.
- Culture is transferred from generation to generation.
- Culture is based on symbolic representations.
- Culture has a pattern characterised by its structure and integration.
- Culture is a variable. Groups, organisations and societies may change according to changes in their environments.

Inkson and Thomas (2004) declare that culture is not only a set of behaviours; it is strongly surrounded in each of us. The characteristics of our social behaviour such as; the way we communicate to each other, our mannerisms, the way we dress and so on, are often expressions of deep culturally based principles and values (Inkson & Thomas, 2004). According to Hofstede (2001), culture consists of shared mental programs that condition individual's reactions to the environment. Inkson and Thomas (2004), Hofstede (2001), Hodgetts and Luthans (2000) discuss the subject of the three different levels of mental programming, which is shown in Figure 3.



*Figure 3, The three levels of human mental programming (Inkson & Thomas, 2004, p. 18, modified by the author).*

The lowest level that is called the human nature in Figure 3 is shared by all members of the human race. The human nature level is also the deepest level, for the reason that it is based on common biological reactions such as sexual drive, territoriality, hunger, and nurturing of the young. Even though individuals come from different cultures, there are still many understandings and behaviours that everyone shares. The middle level that is called the culture in Figure 3 is based on common experiences that some individuals share within a particular group of human beings. Cultural attitudes, values and behaviour, language and way of communication are things that individuals from the same group of people have in common. The highest level in Figure 3 that is called the personality is the unique part of the three levels. All individuals are different; nobody is exactly like another individual. This level is the intensity of individual perceptions and personality, which presents a wide collection of the individuals' behaviour (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2000; Hofstede, 2001; Inkson & Thomas, 2004).

### 2.3.1 Definition of Culture

Originally the word culture derives from the Latin word *cultura*, which means "maintaining" or "tending" (Srka, 2004). The meaning of the word culture is not always the same; there are multiple and varied definitions of the word culture (Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005). The British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) was the conventional cultural evolutionist. He defined culture as *"that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"* (Tylor 1871, p. 1, referred to by Macqueen, 2005). His definition is an unrestricted list, which have been extensive substantial since Tylor first proposed it. Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, two American anthropologists in 1952 published about 160 different definitions of the word culture. They classified all the definitions into eight categories, which are further described in Table 2 (Bodley, 1994).

<b>Topical:</b>	Culture consists of everything on a list of topics, or categories, such as social organisation, religion, or economy.
<b>Historical:</b>	Culture is social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations.
<b>Behavioural:</b>	Culture is shared, learned human behaviour, a way of life.
<b>Normative:</b>	Culture is ideals, values, or rules for living.
<b>Functional:</b>	Culture is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together.
<b>Mental:</b>	Culture is a complex of ideas, or learned habits, that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals.
<b>Structural:</b>	Culture consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols, or behaviours.
<b>Symbolic:</b>	Culture is based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a society.

Table 2, Diverse definition of culture according to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (Source; Bodley, 1994)

As a completion of their extended analysis, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, p.86), based on these eight categories of concept descriptions, suggest the following, inclusive definition:

*“Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.”*

Triandis (1972, referred to by Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005) is given another definition of culture, which is more subjective:

*“Culture is defined as an individual’s characteristic way of perceiving the man-made part of one’s environment. It involves the perception of rules, norms, roles, and values, is influenced by various levels of culture such as language, gender, race, religion, place of residence, and occupation, and it influences interpersonal behavior.”* (p.4)

These two different definitions of culture show the changeability across culture definitions. Even though the two definitions enclose the different levels of culture, they are fairly complex and difficult (Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005). According to Evaristo, Karahanna and Srite (2005), the definition that Hofstede use of the word culture is simpler than both Kluckhohn and Kroeber (1952) and Triandis (1972). He defines culture as the;

*“collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.”* (Hofstede, 2001, p.9)

Furthermore, Hofstede (2001) purpose that several layers of cultural programming exist and that these layers enclose a series of cultures that influence one’s behaviour. These different layers of culture are composed of national, regional, ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, generation, social class and organisational cultures (Hofstede, 2001).

### 2.3.2 Different Levels of Culture

There are many different levels of culture; researchers often find it practical to refer to micro-culture and macro-culture. Micro-culture is shared by smallest social collectivises, e.g. the family, organisation. They all very often share the same attitudes or beliefs, ways of communicating with each other, and treasured material objects that set the group apart from the larger extended family group. Macro-culture is shared by individuals of the same nationality, country or origin of residence. They all originate from the same race and religion (Barter, 1996).

Hofstede (1991) declare that the word culture covers many explanations and meanings, depending on what values are added to the word, and what feelings it brings. According to Hofstede (1991), culture can be divided into five different categories. The following table (Table 3) illustrates the different categories of culture;

National	Traditions and values that people inherit from the country they grew up in.
Regional	Cultural issues on either an ethnical, religious or at a language level.
Gender	Differences between female and male behaviour.
Generation	Differentiate parents from their children and their grandparents. Differences in symbols, heroes, rituals and values to most people.
Organisational	Organisations influence on the values of their employees.

Table 3, *The different categories of culture according to Hofstede (1991, modified by the author).*

Evaristo, Karahanna and Srite (2005) have re-examined earlier research-work to develop their own different levels of cultures. Regional, ethnic, religious, and linguistic relationships cover national cultures, and are considered as super-national dimensions of culture. The various levels of culture, which are called super-national culture, national culture, professional culture, organisational culture and group culture, are defined in Table 4 (Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005).

Level	Definition
Social-National	Any cultural differences that cross national boundaries or can be seen to exist in more than on nation. Can consist of regional, religious, ethnic and linguistics.
- Regional	Belong to a group of people that are living in the same geographic area.
- Religious	Belong to a group of people that are sharing the same believes.
- Ethnic	Belong to a group of people that are sharing common and distinctive characteristics.
- Linguistics	Belong to a group of people that are speaking the same language.
National	Collective properties that are ascribed to citizens of countries.
Professional	Focus on the distinctions between loyalties to the employing organisation versus loyalty to the industry.
Organisational	The attachment of the social and normative aspects that holds the organisations together.
Group	Cultural differences which are included within a single group, workgroup, or other collection of individuals at a level less than that of the organisation.

Table 4, *The different levels of culture according to Evaristo, Karahanna and Srite. (2005, p. 5. modified by the author)*

According to Evaristo, Karahanna and Srite (2005), the various levels of culture are both hierarchically and laterally related (Figure 4). For instance, ethnical culture can cover nations, i.e., people of foreign background and to some extent keep the culture of their home country. Similar arguments can also be made for the other levels of culture such as religious, linguistics, ethnics and professional. The relationship across the different levels of culture is not necessarily hierarchical from the level of super-national culture to the level of group

culture. For example, in multi-national project teams, the organisational culture can cover the national, religious, regional, ethnic, linguistic, and the professional cultures. Moreover, groups may include members from several organisations, nations, professions, religions, linguistic background, regions, and ethnic backgrounds. These interrelations levels of culture are shown diagrammatically in Figure 4 using overlapping and nested ellipses (Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005).

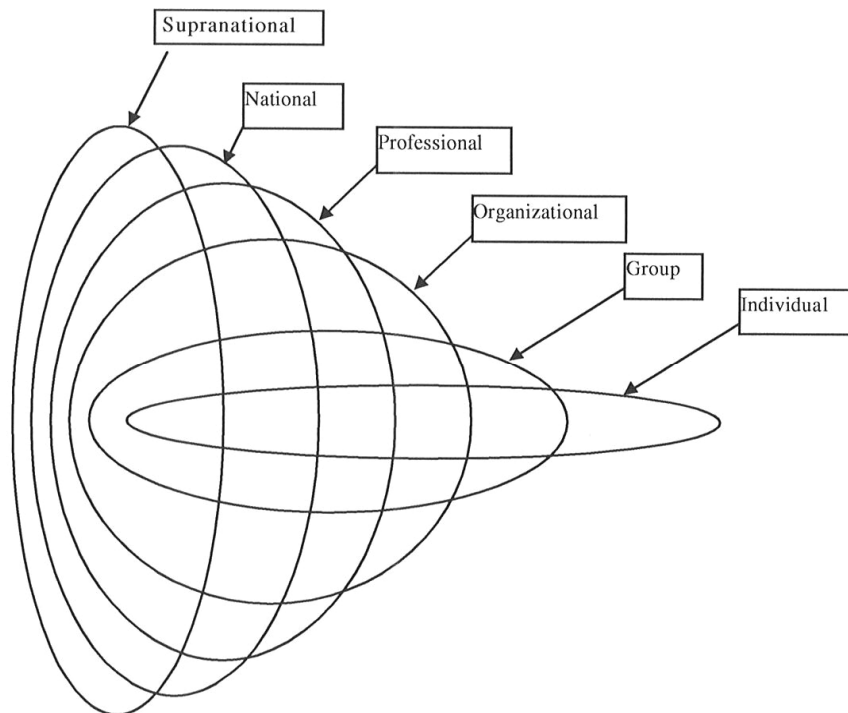


Figure 4, The interrelated levels of culture – illustration of the various levels of culture as both hierarchically and latterly related (Evaristo, Karahanna and Srite, 2005, p. 6).

The ellipse that is called *individual* is not a symbol of another layer of culture; it shows “*how an individual’s culture is the products of several levels of culture*” (Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005, p. 5). Every individual fit into a specific linguistic, ethnic, and national culture. The individuals may have different religion, professional degree, and work positions in an organisation, but depending on the situations some of these cultures may dominate. The individual’s actions and behaviour get influenced by the culture that enfold the individual’s interaction and derive the individual’s unique culture (Evaristo, Karahanna & Srite, 2005).

### 2.3.2.1 Choice of Level

According to Verma (1997), culture is a dominating variable within multi-cultural project teams. The national definition of culture can be described as the way people behave, act, and their manner of thinking and feeling (Verma, 1997). The different sorts of human behaviour and feelings are reflecting from the surrounding while growing up and subsequently continues to effect throughout lifetime (Hofstede, 1991). Thiederman (1991) states that culture is invisible until people start to cooperate with each other. Sparrow and Wu (1998) believes that national culture is shared by all or more or less all members of some social group, which gets



passed on by the older generations to the younger, which in turn characterise the individuals' perception through its behaviour (Sparrow & Wu, 1998).

This dissertation focuses on the occurrence of conflicts that are caused by the level of national culture within multi-cultural project teams, i.e., project teams that involve project team members from different nationalities within Europe. Moreover, the way the project team members act, behave, and their manner of thinking and feeling. Other issues such as religion, values, traditions, attitudes and language will also be included as national culture, since these issues are all a part of an individual's cultural background. The choice of the national level includes the intensity of macro-culture, which refers to individuals from the same nationality and country. Compared to Hofstede's and Evaristo, Karahanna and Srite's classifications of the different levels of culture, the social-national level, the national level and the regional level embrace the issues that are used in this dissertation when examining the level of national culture. The study of national culture is encouraged by a need for better international understanding and collaboration. According to Hofstede Geert, Hofstede Gert Jan and Pendersen (2002), the differences in national culture are just one of the explanations for what occur in any relationships.

## 2.4 Multi-Cultural Project Teams

Increasingly more, organisations are setting up project teams and tasks with multi-cultural co-operations (Barsoux & Schneider, 2003). According to Hong (2005), the human interaction involving different cultures across political, economic, social and cultural boundaries have increased a lot compared with earlier years. According to Verma (1997), the increased cooperation between the mixtures of the different cultures may significantly influence success in negotiations for international project teams (Verma, 1997). The latest investigation has confirmed that once the multicultural project teams are completed, their performance is better than the monoculture project teams. The dilemma with multi-cultural project teams is how to get established and emerge from the same ground, whereas monoculture projects teams have less trouble in finding a method of operation which fits all the project team members (Barsoux & Schneider, 2003). Verma (1997) confirms that multi-cultural project teams are more complex in general, due to the diversity of the project team members. Rhinesmith (1996) declares that multi-cultural project teams that are efficient and effective are fundamental to future global workforce motivation, competitiveness and management.

According to Oh (2004), the desire of international qualification of working with organisations from different countries, different value-systems and different beliefs, is growing very hastily compared with the earlier periods. The reasons for that are among others;

- Worldwide recruitments to defeat graduate surpluses,
- Cross-boarder mergers, joint-ventures and acquisitions,
- Continuing improvement in communications technology (Oh, 2004).

According to Davison (1994), a multi-cultural project team can bring richer and more appropriate solutions. Project teams like that can expand a manager's interpersonal skills and contribute towards creating a wider network for organisations that participate in multi-cultural project teams. Project teams like that can also bring increased communication difficulties, interpersonal conflicts and largely higher costs (Davison, 1994). Garvey, Jassawalla and

Truglia (2004) recent study showed that nothing is more essential than issues of interpersonal conflict arising from cultural differences (Garvey, Jassawalla & Truglia, 2004). According to Selmer (2001), there are two main reasons for the growing amount of multi-cultural project teams. The first reason is that there is a larger ensemble between the cultures from the different countries. The second reason is that the competitive strength of the organisations gets improved by the efficient handling of cross-cultural encounters (Selmer, 2001). According to Hong (2005), the increased mixtures of different cultures within a multi-cultural project team enhance stress and anxieties among the project team members, which in turn may enlarge intercultural conflicts.

According to Solomon (1998), multi-cultural project teams come into several formations. Usually, they fall into one of two categories: they either fall into 'intercultural teams' or 'into virtual global teams' (Solomon, 1998).

#### 2.4.1 Intercultural Teams

The intercultural teams are project teams, which involve people from different cultures, were they meet up face-to-face during the time they are working together in the project team (Solomon, 1998). These types of teams have the ability to contribute to a more beneficial work than project teams that have to co-operate in distance from each other. This because the communication can be more successful when the message is correctly perceived and understood. Cultural differences are a threat for the communication for the fact that they reduce the accessibility of codes and conventions that are shared (Inkson & Thomas, 2004). According to Verma (1997), language is the primary medium of communication within intercultural teams. Language includes words and expressions that may stand for different things in different cultures. To learn the language of a culture, is the same as to know its people, which also help to understand the cultural differences regarding values, beliefs, ways of life, and points of view (Verma, 1997). An intercultural team may be a more efficient team than the virtual team, due to the fact that the project team members are able to express their thoughts and feelings more, build a better relationship, exchange information which will perhaps decrease the misunderstandings between the project team members compared to a virtual team (Inkson & Thomas, 2004).

Religion, beliefs, traditions, the aspect of time, values and attitudes are some issues that are different within different cultures. These issues can be an obstacle for intercultural teams, for the reason that they may create misunderstanding among the project team members. Religion influence each of the other elements of culture, i.e., it affects dress, eating, attitudes of workers, toward work, punctuality and work site. Attitudes toward time differ within different cultures. For instance, promptness and punctuality is valued within some culture, whereas in some other cultures, appointments cover a general time interval rather than a precise time (Verma, 1997).

#### 2.4.2 Virtual Global Teams

Virtual global teams are project teams that involve people that remain in their separate locations around the world and perform meetings by the use of different forms of technology (Solomon, 1998). Ahna et al. (2005) describes a virtual global team as a group of people who cooperate through co-dependent tasks guided by common purpose, where the project team

members work together across space, time, and organisational boundaries using a variety of communication technologies. Virtual global teams are project-focused; they are created when a project team arises, and disbanded when the project team is completed (Ahna et al., 2005). The virtual global teams are linked together via computer and communicational technology. These project teams work together either synchronous or asynchronous mode. In synchronous project teams, the members of the project team collaborate in real-time. While in the asynchronous project teams, the members of the project team perform their assigned tasks at different times, i.e. at their own tempo, and according to their own time limitations (Mykytyn et al., 2004).

With the increased globalisation of commercial activities it has become very common for organisations, especially for those that span across nations, to collect people from different locations into virtual global teams. Virtual global teams are created among other things by organisations that want to build up a co-operation with other organisations around the world. To stay in the marketplace it becomes very important with such co-operation. Other advantages with virtual global teams is that they may provide an increased utilisation of employee-time, round-the-clock workforce availability, and the opportunity to influence expertise and knowledge around the world. The use of virtual global teams can on the other hand also bring many challenges such as the use of technology efficiently, the need to manage project team heterogeneity, and develop trust among the project team members and so forth. An increased amount of project team members with different cultural background may result in less effective performance. The members of a virtual global team collaborate and communicate with each other by using different types of groupware technologies. This kind of collaboration and communication frequently offer lower levels of information richness and social presence than face-to-face meetings. Technologies such as video conferencing are more effective than others, such as voice and electronic mail. Appropriate assessment of these two factors is essential in the selection of a suitable groupware technology and its following use by virtual teams. Trust is another vital factor that is needed, but the development of it becomes a major challenge for virtual global team members for the reason that they may never meet in face-to-face meetings. This since they work on short term or temporary project teams, while a trusting alliance usually develops in long-term relationships (Mykytyn et al., 2004).

Additionally, the characteristics of communication through technology, particularly in a virtual global team, may contribute to conflicts within the project teams. Hence, the environment of electronic exchange within the virtual global teams may be a source of conflict, for instance when the level of information richness is low because of a lean medium of communication. This in turn may have consequences of different interpretation, confusion, and ultimately conflicting point of view (Mykytyn et al., 2004).

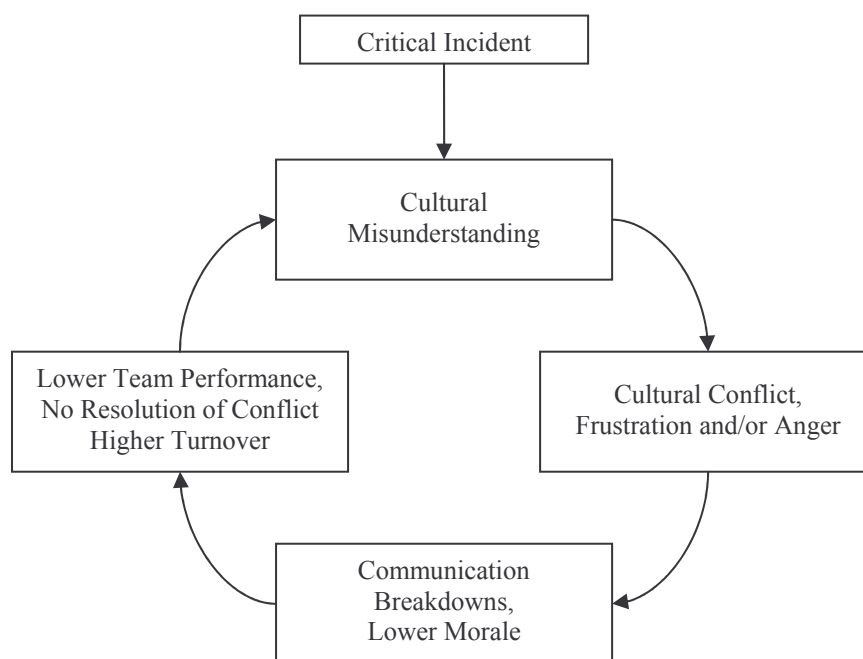
### 2.4.3 Conflicts within Multi-Cultural Project Teams

Multinational organisations are increasingly using multi-cultural project teams to amplify the speed in launching products to the market and bring together employers from different locations, cultural perspectives, and functional areas. While such project teams offer many advantages, they also involve many challenges (Czaplewski, Milliman & Taylor, 2002). According to Philips (1992), it is essential to understand the cultural differences, towards manage an effectively multicultural project team. Cultural understanding develops into the basis of the multicultural project team's success or failure in any endeavour (Nicholson &

Stepina, 1998). The project team members work more effectively if they are valued by the top management group. The employees are able to devote a large amount of power to work harder, if the power is shared (Harris & Moran, 2000).

According to Graen and Hui (1996), the differentiation of people across nations and cultures believe and behave differently. Both nations and cultures are separable in terms of the definition of specific phenomena. The phenomena include language, behaviour and institutions. According to Brew and Cairns (2004), when people from different cultural orientations work within the same workplace, conflict easily occur between the project team members, due to the fact that the project team members have different selections of need and/or negotiate conflict in different styles (Brew & Cairns, 2004). Dawson and Nixon (2002) believes that conflicts within multi-cultural project teams occur because of ethno-cultural factors such as; religion, attitudes, values and norms.

According to Czaplewski, Milliman and Taylor (2002), a critical incident, such as performance feedback across the different cultures within a multi-cultural project team can often lead to cultural misunderstandings. A misunderstanding between the different cultures often creates a 'cycle of conflict' (see Figure 5) where cultural conflict, frustration, and possibly anger lead to communication breakdowns and lower morale resulting in lower team performance and potentially higher turnover (Czaplewski, Milliman & Taylor, 2002).



*Figure 5, The life cycle of cultural conflict.  
(Milliman, Taylor & Czaplewski, 2002, modified by the author)*

According to Thamhain and Wilemon (1975), conflict over schedules, conflict over priorities, conflict over manpower, conflict over technical issues, conflict over administration, personality conflict and conflict over cost are all typical conflicts that occur during the entire project life cycle. According to Verma (1997), culture is a dominating variable within multi-cultural project team environments. He believes that project managers can face problems

related to project team quality, cost, schedule and people if they are incapable to recognize and deal with the most important elements of culture and understand cultural differences among the project team members (Verma, 1997).

According to Garvey, Jassawalla and Truglia (2004), scholars have compared and contrasted organisational conflict that arises in Turkey and Middle East countries versus the United States. The issues that differed between the different cultures were religion, language, geographical location as well as in cultural values and beliefs (Garvey, Jassawalla & Truglia, 2004).

Verma (1997) declares that there are some important critical dimensions of cultural differences. Each dimension can be related as an aspect of a culture, which can be considered relative to other cultures. These different dimensions that are presented in Figure 4 help the project team members to understand the dynamics of culture and its effect on a project team's behaviours (Verma, 1997).

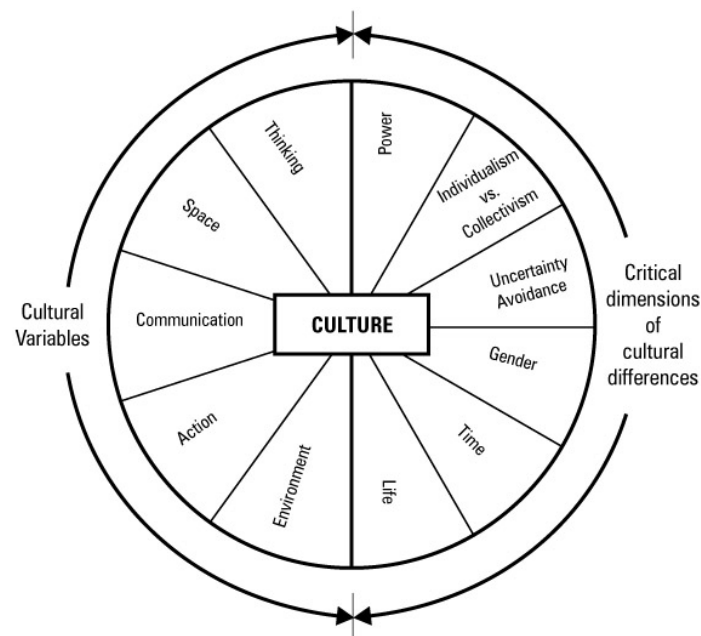


Figure 6, Cultural Orientations Model - Critical Dimensions and Cultural Variables that can cause conflicts within multi-cultural project teams (Verma, 1997).

The dimensions that will be further investigated in this dissertation are those which belong to national culture, such as; the aspect of time, attitudes towards life, environment, action, communication and space.

According to Schneider (1995), problems probably arise among the project team members because of the cultural differences between the project team members, not interpreted within their own context, or unrecognised. He also declares that the basic patterns of culturally shaped human behaviour are affected by, for instance, life rhythm, time consciousness, time divisions, and information density. The project team members of the same culture are united by the same understanding and behaviour in these respects (Schneider, 1995). According to Burgess and Enhassi (1990), misunderstandings within multi-cultural project teams occur because of the differences in religion, value and attitudes, traditions and language. These

factors can cause difficulties for the project team members and the project managers with other background and also for the local ones (Burgess & Enhassi, 1990). According to Verma (1997), the aspect of time, attitudes towards life, environment, action, communication and space are also issues that contribute to misunderstandings and conflicts regarding the differences in national culture between the project team members within a multi-cultural project team (Verma, 1997).

**Religion (belief):** As an individual, it is very important to think of the work force's religious pattern in order to not give offence when dealing with them. Even though all the employees do not observe religious practices, project team members of the work force in for instance the Middle-East who are practising do expect breaks for prayer and less working hours during the month of fasting. It is also important to know that non-observant employees for fair reasons expect the same treatment. This kind of try will increase motivation and raise the level of morale (Burgess & Enhassi, 1990).

**Values and attitudes:** It is very important to be aware of the differences in work force attitudes and values, for the reason to develop an open-minded attitude to the project team members and respect them. Every country has its own culture, with different perceptions and attitudes towards how they do and how they approach methods. The project managers and the project team members need therefore to appreciate and understand such differences in order to achieve better output (Burgess & Enhassi, 1990). The values of trust between the project managers and the project team members are also essential issues that help to improve the teamwork between the team members within a multi-cultural project team. Different cultures have different areas when it comes to trust, because of the different ways of communicating with each other (Reynolds, 1998). According to Verma (1997), attitudes towards life relate to the value system of individuals in different cultures with respect to their craving for material things. The individuals tend to be more competitive, they emphasise achievements and the acquisition of material goods and money. The individuals value quality of life more than quantity. They are more cooperative and they tend to emphasise on relationships, concern for others, and interdependence (Verma, 1997).

**Tradition:** The project team members and the project managers that are working in a different culture need to break of the traditional barriers between the different individuals that originates from a different culture. To manage a better communication, reduced costs and an increased productivity, the project managers and the project team members need to understand the behaviour of the others and to express a truthful interest in their tradition. This can be achieved if the project manager establishes a rapport with his/her multi-cultural workforce (Burgess & Enhassi, 1990).

**Language:** The difficulties with language can slow down the work process because of the difficulties with the daily communication. Even if all the project team members can speak English, the mixture of intonation, accents and degree of fluency can present major difficulties during a conversation. This problem can be solved by:

- Letting the different project teams use bilingual employees.
- Develop the skills of good listeners.
- Letting multi-national organisations consider of educating the employees with an intensive language courses. Another option is to educate their project manager's external language courses so that they could obtain basic knowledge of the language that they will encountered among their project team members (Burgess & Enhassi, 1990).

**Time:** Manrai and Manrai (1995) confirm that the concept of time and its usage is different across individuals from low-context cultures (i.e. Western Europe and United States) and individuals from high-context culture (i.e. Asia, Middle East, South America). The time differences between the high-context culture and the low-context culture can be relatively important of the social relationship and schedules (Manrai & Manrai, 1995). According to Schneider (1995), each culture has its own rhythm, if rhythms are not synchronised, human beings do not get along very well with each other. In some cultures, time can be a measure of work performance and competence. The way time can be divided into, is also indicative of a particular culture. Some cultures likes to divide time, while others atomize time. Those cultures who divide time make it understandable and organise it. Whereas the people within the culture that like to atomize time do many things at once, and social contact with others is also important to them. The information density requirement is another basic pattern that determines behaviour. The people, who need further information in order to understand better, because they preserve less informal information networks, have a 'weak context'. Whereas, people with intense information networks are frequently well informed; their level of sharing of stored data is high (Schneider, 1995). According to Barsoux and Schneider (1997), different attitudes to time also influence the relationship between project team members and the environment (Barsoux & Schneider, 1997). According to Verma (1997), time relates to value of time, time horizon, and focus.

- Value of time (punctuality/flexibility) – The value of time is determined by the way punctuality is defined and valued by the different cultures. For instance, in Northern Europe and in the United States, punctuality is defined as precisely, e.g., deadlines are taken serious and meetings start on time. Whereas punctuality is defined to some extent loosely in Spain, Italy and Latin American countries.
- Time horizon (long-term/short-term orientation) – Long-term orientations confirms an inclination towards strategic/long-term plans, future rewards, thrift and perseverance. While on the other hand short-term orientation focuses on past and present, with a particular respect for traditions, fulfilling social obligations and preservation of “face”.
- Focus (single focus/multiple focus) – People in the Northern European cultures and the United States tend to accentuate on single focus which signifies concentration on one task at a time and having obligation to schedule and plans. Whereas the people in the Southern Europe, Latin America and Middle East are multiple-focus oriented, which signifies that they put more importance on relationships than schedules and deadlines (Verma, 1997).

**Environment:** The environment influence peoples behaviour with respect to the orientations of harmony, control and constraint (Verma, 1997).

- Harmony – This orientation is very ordinary and popular in Asia. The individuals believe that it is better to live with harmony among other individuals and with the environment, and unity permeates all forms of life.
- Control – This orientation is very characteristic of people in Northern European countries and the United States. Individuals feel that they have complete control of their environment and they can change it to fit their needs and meet their goals.
- Constraints – This orientation is characteristic of people in the Middle East and Latin American countries. They believe that fate, chance and luck can significantly influence their outcomes. They believe that God has ultimate power and controls all the people’s lives; and unexpected circumstance will impact the results of their efforts (Verma, 1997).

**Action:** The differences in cultures can determine how passive or aggressive people are. People's orientation to action can be classified in task and relationship oriented categories (Verma, 1997).

- Task orientation – Cultures such as Northern Europeans and the United States are action-oriented. These cultures emphasise on accomplishments and achievements of their objectives. When people from such cultures introduce themselves they usually tell their job title or job description.
- Relationship orientation - Cultures such as Africans, Middle Eastern and Latin Americans are relationship-oriented. These cultures emphasise on experiences and relationships more than just work and achievements. When people from such cultures introduce themselves they normally tell their family name, clan or other affiliation (Verma, 1997).

**Communication:** This is a very important issue of cultural differences that can cause communication breakdowns, which can lead to serious problems in negotiations, sales, achieving teamwork, and conflict management. There are many different classifications of cultural orientation of communication such as (Verma, 1997);

- High context – This type of orientation is common among people in Asia, Latin America and Middle East. They consider it to be interesting to find out information about family background, character, education and political connections, furthermore to an individual's technical skills and experiences. Building and maintaining relationships is a vital first step toward conducting business.
- Low context – This type of orientation is common among people in the United States. People from the United States prefer to give information in words and to express the meanings explicit. The communication among low context people is direct and minimal relationship is distinguished adequate to conduct business.
- Direct – This type of orientations is common among managers that originate from the United States. They choose to identify a conflict, evaluate it, find its cause and then manage it. This communication style refers to straightforwardness.
- Indirect – This type of orientation is common in many Latin American and Asian countries. The people with this type of communication prefer to keep away from conflicts in order to agree to other party to save face, and preserve respect and honour. For instance, people in China and Japan often say “yes” when they really mean “I am not sure” or “I understand”.
- Expressive – This type of orientation is common among people from the Middle East and Latin America. They prefer to show emotions, make use of the body language, and stress relationships.
- Instrumental – This type of orientation is common among people from Northern and Western Europe, Japan and the United States. They draw attention to objectivity and facts, more than the body language and emotions.
- Formal – This type of orientation is common among the people from Eastern Europe, Latin America, Middle East and Asia. They call attention to status or formal authority and tend to follow traditions in greeting their business dress code, associates, and exchange business gifts and cards.
- Informal – This type of orientation is common among people that originate from Australia, Canada and the United States. They prefer to use their first names immediately in business, while in other countries they only use the first names after developing closer business relationships. People from the United States prefer to shake hands firmly with direct eye contact and a smile, while Japanese people are more formal, and instead prefer to exchange business cards with a bow, no handshakes, and



only a minimal eye contact. In some cultures such as Native Americans, eye contact is considered lack of respect and rude (Verma, 1997).

**Space:** The differences about the personal space (the distance between individuals) differ in the different cultures. The physical space is divided into private and public spaces while communicating with others (Verma, 1997).

- Private – This orientation is very common in the United States. People with this orientation prefer distance between the other individuals during a conversation. In private space environments there are minimal disruptions and interruption and more closed door meetings.
- Public – This orientation is common in Latin America and Asia. People with this orientation prefer open doors in offices and close proximity. People feel free to enter another's space and there are repeated interruptions (Verma, 1997).

## 2.5 Summary

Conflict is a natural part of the daily activities of any workplace, but when people from different cultural backgrounds are cooperating, problems beyond the typical tensions may arise (Brew & Cairns, 2004). The most interesting issue in this dissertation is to examine why conflicts occur in multi-cultural project teams. More specifically, to examine the typical cultural differences which are causing conflicts within European project teams.

As mentioned before, Thamhain and Wilemon (1975) have examined seven usual sources that frequently contribute to conflicts in most of the project teams. These seven sources are conflict over: Project priorities, administrative procedure, technical opinions, manpower resource, costs, schedules, and personality conflict. The occurrence of conflicts concerning the national level in multi-cultural project teams can lead to aggravating circumstances of the seven usual sources of conflict that occur in most of the project teams. The differences in cultural background and cultural behaviour between the project team members within multi-cultural project teams contribute to misunderstandings between the project team members. The misunderstandings arise from the different views that the project team members have regarding religion, values, attitudes, language, traditions, and norms and so forth. Each culture separates itself from other cultures by specific resolutions it chooses to certain problems and how it approaches these problems (Richard & Sayed, 1996). A multi-cultural project team seems therefore to be more complex to be in charge of than a monoculture project team. Conflicts arise from many different cultural issues; these issues that differ between the project team members are issues regarding religion, values, attitudes, language, communication, traditions, and the aspect of time.

Previous investigations have been made concerning national issues that cause misunderstandings and conflicts between the different cultures that are involved within multi-cultural project teams. Cultures such as Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe (Spain and Italy), Latin America, Asia (Japan and China), Middle East, the United States, Australia, Canada and Africa have been compared and studied, not all with each other but each and one of them with some of the other cultures, in many different variations of studies (Burgess & Enhassi, 1990; Manrai & Manrai, 1995; Reynolds, 1998; Schneider, 1995; Verma, 1997). Unlike earlier researches, this dissertation concentrates on project teams that only consist of European project team members. The empirical research is

based on interviews with project managers that have been or still are leading project teams that consisted of European project team members. The main part of the research is to investigate the project manager's experiences regarding conflicts that arise between the different European project team members concerning national culture. Moreover, the way the project team members act, behave, and their manner of thinking and feeling. Other issues such as religion, values, traditions, attitudes, language and the aspect of time are also included as a national culture, since these issues are all a part of an individual's cultural background.

## 3. METHOD

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The following part concerns the choice of research design, participants, instrument and procedure. This part gives detailed information about the selected method and the process of the collection of the primary and secondary data.

### 3.1 Research Design

This research aims to investigate people's experiences regarding typical conflicts that occur within project teams that only consist of project team members with European cultural background. To achieve the most spontaneous answers to the questions the principal factor was to bring forward the participants own opinions.

The choice of the chosen approach to use in this dissertation is qualitative research. Qualitative research is used in management and business to study the way organisations, groups and individuals interact and behave (White, 2003). Atkinson and Bouma (1995) declares that a qualitative research can be illustrated as any social science research that brings out result that is not attained by statistical procedures of methods of quantifications (Atkinson & Bouma, 1995). A qualitative research investigates the way people react, work, live and manage their daily lives (White, 2003).

### 3.2 Participants

The target group of this dissertation is project managers, which are leading or have been leading multi-cultural projects within organisations located in Europe. All the participants are project managers for multi-cultural project teams in extensive organisations in Sweden or organisations in collaboration with Swedish organisations. Some of the project managers' team did not only consist of European project team members, during the interview they where told to only focus on the conflicts between the European project team members within their project teams.

#### 3.2.1 Participating Organisations

The organisations that participated in this empirical research are all well known and ruling organisations in Sweden and many other countries. There are six different organisations that participated in this dissertation, and these organisations will be renamed from their actual names to Organisation I, Organisation II, Organisation III, Organisation IV, Organisation V and Organisation VI.

### *3.2.1.1 Organisation I*

Organisation I is a ruling telecommunications company in the Nordic and Baltic region. The organisation also holds a strong position in mobile communications in Turkey, Eurasia and Russia. The organisation have about 30 000 employees all around the world. The section where the participating project manager works for is located in Gothenburg (Sweden) and have about 1 600 employees.

### *3.2.1.2 Organisation II*

Organisation II work with healthcare products, coatings and chemicals. The organisation have about 63 000 employees in more than 80 countries. The organisation is divided into many subsidiaries all around the world, but the participating subsidiary have operations in 54 countries, with 3500 employees worldwide. It is a worldwide market leader in Marine, Protective, Yacht and Aerospace paint. The section where the participating project manager works for is located in Felling (United Kingdom) and has about 800 employees on site.

### *3.2.1.3 Organisation III*

Organisation III is an establishment and performs research, undergraduate studies, graduate studies, doctoral studies, and contract education through four schools: The International Business School, School of Education and Communication, School of Engineering and School of Health Sciences. The Swedish students in the university come from all over Sweden and it has a highly developed organisation for international contacts and about 300 partner universities abroad. The University have 658 employees and about 9 000 students. The participating project manager works for the institute of Engineering that is located in Jönköping (Sweden), which have about 150 employees and 1 700 students. The School of Engineering focuses on Technological Improvements in small and medium-sized organisations

### *3.2.1.4 Organisation IV*

Organisation IV is one of the world's leading pharmaceutical organisations. The organisation provides innovative, effective medicines designed to struggle disease in essential areas of medical need such as; cardiovascular, cancer, gastrointestinal, neuroscience, infection and respiratory. Organisation IV have over 65 000 employees' worldwide, and about 13 000 employees in Sweden. The section where the participating project manager works for is located in Lund (Sweden) and have about 1 200 employees on site.

### *3.2.1.5 Organisation V*

Organisation V is one of the world's leading provider of telecommunications equipment and associated services to mobile and fixed network operations globally. Organisation V has about 50 500 employees' worldwide and about 21 300 employees in Sweden. The section where the participating project manager works for is located in Stockholm (Sweden) and have about 9 000 employees.

### 3.2.1.6 Organisation VI

Organisation VI is one of the world's leading companies in construction-related services and project development. The organisation has about 54 000 employees' worldwide and about 12 000 employees in Sweden. The section where the participating project manager works for is located in Karlstad (Sweden) and has about 250 employees.

### 3.2.2 Participating Project Managers

The project managers that participated in this empirical research have all been working as project managers for a long time. The participating project managers have also been leading project teams where the project team members originate from European countries. The participating project managers were six people, one from each participating organisation. The project managers will be renamed from their actual names to Project Manager I, Project Manager II, Project Manager III, Project Manager IV, Project Manager V and Project Manager VI. Their correspondent Latin number is matched up with the organisation they work for, i.e., Project Manager I work for Organisation I and Project Manager II works for Organisation II and so forth. A brief presentation of the participated project managers is presented in Table 5.

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Cultural Background</b>
<b>Project Manager I</b>	Male	37	Born in a Middle East country, but raised in Sweden.
<b>Project Manager II</b>	Female	49	British
<b>Project Manager III</b>	Male	49	Swedish
<b>Project Manager IV</b>	Female	51	Swedish
<b>Project Manager V</b>	Male	42	Born in a Western European country.
<b>Project Manager VI</b>	Male	36	Swedish

*Table 5, A brief presentation of the participating project managers.*

## 3.3 Instrument

The chosen research instrument of this dissertation is face-to-face interviews with a few project managers. The main thing has been to obtain new information from the interviews. A comparison between the data and previous research has been made to find out if there are any differences or any links between previous studies and the interviews.

Interviewing is a method of collecting data that can stand on its own or be a follow-up process to another method. This method helps the researcher to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires. There are two types of interviews; personal interviews and group interviews. The advantages with an interview is that the interviewer is face-to-face with the interviewee, so the interviewer can clear up any misunderstandings directly. The researcher also gets the opportunity to re-word or re-order the questions if something unexpected come about (White, 2003).

Interviews can be classified by their degrees of structure or the scope to which the interviewer plan the questions in advance. There are three types of interviews that are based on three quantities of structures. These different types are defined as: unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews (Northern Caribbean University, 2005).

The semi-structured interview is the chosen method in this dissertation, since the group interview is not an option because of the distances and different schedules of the participating project managers. The author of this dissertation values the benefits of the chosen methodology, which are (Crouch & Housden, 2003);

- To obtain relevant and more detailed information.
- To be able to choose the audiences, which the author of this dissertation find appropriate to the research.
- To structure so as to allow comparisons.
- To give freedom to explore general views or opinions in more detail.
- To be able to use an external organisation as a participant so as to retain independence.
- To be able to use questions for sensitive topics.

This type of interview is controlled by a list of questions and topics to be covered. The semi-structured interview can be defined as a “*method of data collection which involves an interaction between an interviewer and the interviewee for which the purpose is to obtain valid and reliable information*” (Neitzschman & Neitzschman, 2002, pp 23). Semi-structured interviews involve a series of open-ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover. These kinds of questions define the topic under investigation but provide opportunities for both the interviewer and the interviewee to discuss some topics more detailed. Semi-structured interviews are practicable when collecting attitudinal information on a large scale, or when the research is exploratory and it is not possible to draw up a list of possible pre-codes because little is known about the subject area (Fox, Hunn & Mathers, 2002).

### 3.3.1 Design of the Questions

Before writing down the questions for the interviews, the researcher identified several important outcomes of a well-conducted literature review. It is important to review the relevant literature from the outset of the research. This helps the researcher to refine focus and enable to set conceptual boundaries on what is relevant. This in turn facilitated for the researcher to come up with useful and important questions that helped the researcher to draw a good conclusion. The questions for the interviews were designed in a way to manage identify the project managers’ point of view of issues that contribute to conflicts within their European project teams. The first part of the interview was designed to gain knowledge about the project teams, concerning the different nationalities that are involved and the size of the project. The second part categorises the project teams and identifies typical issues that contribute to conflicts within multi-cultural project teams.

The questions that were used for the interviews (see Appendix I) were created by the author of this dissertation. The interviews consisted of two parts; the first part included the background of the participants, the organisation and the mixture of nationalities that were involved within the project teams that the project managers were leading. While the second part included questions about the type of the project team they are or have been leading, and about conflicts within their European project teams.

Previous investigations analysis typical conflicts that occur within multi-cultural project teams that consist of project team members from all part of the world. Some investigations are based on the occurrences of conflicts between two or more cultures from two or more countries which are located in different continents of the world. Unlike other examinations, this dissertation emphasis on project teams where the project team member originates merely from countries within Europe. The intend with the interviews is to find out more specific about conflicts regarding national issues that occur in project teams that only consist of European team members. The author of this dissertation finds it interesting to manage to compare her results with previous examinations.

## 3.4 Procedure

A description of how the collection of both the primary data and the secondary data was obtained is illustrated in this part, i.e., a description regarding both the theoretical framework and the primary data collection at the organisations.

### 3.4.1 Literature Review

This study is based on among other things course literature from the courses Human Resource Management and Project Psychology. The classic, definitive or most influential pieces of the research within this area are books that deal with cross-cultural issues and conflicts within project teams, and articles that were found in the databases of Chalmers University and Northumbria University and E-books. Science-direct, ABI/INFORM Global, Emerald and Books 24x7 are some of the databases that have been used for this dissertation. Many search words where used, both individually and combined with other words to find proper information. Words like project teams, conflicts, multi-cultural teams, cultural misunderstandings, cross-cultural conflicts, virtual teams, and intercultural teams are just a few words that were used. The author of this dissertation also used the Internet for additional information, past dissertations, and literature from the library that was found in the libraries of the University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University. There are also many previous research projects that are presented in form of published articles or as research reports or thesis, that have been used for additional information.

The study relates to the larger, ongoing dialogue that exists within the scholarly literature by experiences, knowledge and based on interviews and the data that has been found.

### 3.4.2 Finding a Sample

The project managers that have been interviewed for this dissertation where recommended by their organisations. It started with contacting several organisations if they had any ongoing project teams where the project team members originates from mixed nationalities from different part of Europe. Some of the organisations that did not have any ongoing multi-cultural project teams at the moment recommended project managers that have been working with multi-cultural project teams recently, whereas most of the organisations suggested project managers that were leading ongoing multi-cultural project teams. The chosen project

managers were interviewed throughout a face-to-face meeting, phone-call meeting or through e-mail.

### 3.4.3 Structure of Interviews

The primary choice for the selected structure of the interviews was face-to-face interviews. Because of the far distances between the author of this dissertation and the participating project managers', phone-call interviews and e-mail interviews had to be the secondary choice.

The interviews with Project Manager I and Project Manager III was a face-to-face interview, while the interviews with Project Manager II and Project Manager IV were both through e-mail and phone-calls. The interview with Project Manager V was made through a phone-call and the interview with Project Manager VI was made through e-mail.



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## 4. RESULT

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The following section presents the results from the interviews with the participating project managers. The answers from the interviews have been summarised by the author of this dissertation, which can be seen in the following sections of this chapter. Some of the headlines do not have concrete explanations of the answers, whereas other headlines have very detailed contents. That is, due to the different methods that has been used during the interviews. Some of the participating project managers had been interviewed during face-to-face meeting, whereas some through phone-call and e-mail or just through e-mail.

### 4.1 The Project Teams

All the participating project managers are leading project teams that consist of project team members that originate from European countries. These involved project teams are all different from each other, concerning issues such as the size of the project teams, the duration of the project teams and the involved nationalities in the project teams. The project teams will be renamed from their actual names to Project Team I, Project Team II, Project Team III, Project Team IV, Project Team V and Project Team VI. Their correspondent Latin number is matched up with the organisation they work for and the project manager that has been or still is leading the project team, i.e., Project Team I has Project Manager I as a leader and they work for Organisation I and Project Team II has Project Manager II as a leader and they works for Organisation II and so forth.

All the participating project managers work for organisations within Europe. The participating organisations are all well known and leading in many countries and continents of the world. This dissertation only focuses on the project teams that consist of European project team members. A brief presentation of the participated European countries is shown Table 6.

<b>Participating European Countries in the Project Teams</b>	
1. Austria	9. Netherlands
2. Belgium	10. Norway
3. Denmark	11. Serbia
4. Germany	12. Spain
5. Ireland	13. Sweden
6. Italy	14. Switzerland
7. Latvia	15. United Kingdom
8. Malta	

*Table 6, A list of the participating European countries in the involved project teams.*

#### 4.1.1 Project Team I

Project Manager I has been leading a project team with project team members from Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The project team consisted of 25 project team members and the duration of the project team was four months. The project team members were familiar with the members from their own country and not with the other members from the other participating countries.

#### 4.1.2 Project Team II

Project Manager II is at the moment leading a project team with European members from United Kingdom, Sweden, Netherlands, Ireland and Italy. The project team will eventually impact on all European destinations to about plus 20 more countries in total. The amount of project team members is about 15 and the duration of the project team is one year. Very few of the project team members knew each other from earlier collaborations, for instance the British and the Swedish members knew each other from earlier collaborations.

#### 4.1.3 Project Team III

Project Manager III is leading a project team with members from Sweden, Belgium, Germany and Italy. The project team consists of eight project team members and the duration of the project team is unlimited so far. It started 1998 and will go on until they manage to implement their new system. The project team members did not know each other from earlier collaborations; this was their first time working together.

#### 4.1.4 Project Team IV

Project Manager IV has been leading a project team with European members from Sweden, United Kingdom and Germany. The project teams had an average of seven project team members on each party. The duration of the project team was about 2 years. A few of the project team members knew each other from earlier collaborations.

#### 4.1.5 Project Team V

Project Manager V has been leading a project team with European members from Sweden, United Kingdom, Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Spain. The project team consisted of 130 project team members and the duration of the project team was one year. The project team members did not know each other from earlier collaborations; this was their first time working together.

#### 4.1.6 Project Team VI

Project Manager VI is still leading a project team with European members from Sweden, Malta, United Kingdom, Serbia, Italy and Latvia. The project team consists of 50 project team members and the duration of the project team is 10-15 years. Many of the project team members knew each other from earlier collaborations.

### 4.2 Intercultural or Virtual Global Teams

All the participating project teams in this study are different, multi-cultural project teams comes into several formations. Generally, they fall into one of two groupings; they either fall into “intercultural teams” or into “virtual global teams”. The virtual global teams work together either synchronous or asynchronous mode. In synchronous project teams, the project team members collaborate with each other in real-time. Whereas in the asynchronous project teams, the project team members perform their assigned tasks at different times, i.e. at their own tempo, and according to their own time limitations.

A few of the participating project teams are intercultural teams, whereas the majority of the participating project teams are virtual global teams. Table 7 illustrates which group the participating project teams belong to.

	<b>Intercultural Team</b>	<b>Virtual Global Team</b>
<b>Project Team I</b>		X
<b>Project Team II</b>		X
<b>Project Team III</b>		X
<b>Project Team IV</b>		X
<b>Project Team V</b>	X	X
<b>Project Team VI</b>	X	

*Table 7, Intercultural teams o virtual global teams*

The virtual global teams can work together either synchronous or asynchronous mode. Table 8 illustrates how the participating project teams collaborate with each other when they work in distance.

	<b>Synchronous</b>	<b>Asynchronous</b>
<b>Project Team I</b>		X
<b>Project Team II</b>	X	
<b>Project Team III</b>		X
<b>Project Team IV</b>	X	X
<b>Project Team V</b>	X	X

*Table 8, Virtual global teams and their working mode.*

Project Team I was a virtual global team where the project team members worked during different times, but when it was time to urge their new system all the project team members had to work during the same timetable. They worked asynchronous in the beginning of the project team life cycle and exchange to synchronous in the end of the project team life cycle.

Project Team II is a virtual global team that is working synchronous. Every now and then the project team meets up in face-to-face meetings.

Project Team III is a virtual global team where the project team members work during different times. They work asynchronous most of the time, except during the time they meet up in face-to-face meetings.

Project Team IV was a virtual global team that was working both synchronous and asynchronous depending on their time schedules. Every now and then, the project team met up in face-to-face meetings.

Project Team V had one head-office and three district-offices with district-managers on each office, which were responsible for the local activities. The project team was working both as a virtual global team and an intercultural team. The project team was also working both synchronous and asynchronous depending on their time schedules.

Project Team VI is an intercultural team where the project team members' works face-to-face almost every day on the production site/office.

### 4.3 The Occurrence of Conflicts during the Project Life Cycle

Conflicts within project teams arise during different time-periods depending on what phase the project team is in. The following table (Table 8) shows what the participating project managers have experienced concerning the occurrence of conflicts during the project life cycle.

	<b>In Which Phase of the Project Life Cycle do Conflicts Occur Most?</b>
<b>Project Manager I</b>	The planning phase The implementation phase
<b>Project Manager II</b>	The planning phase The implementation phase
<b>Project Manager III</b>	The whole project life cycle
<b>Project Manager IV</b>	The implementation phase
<b>Project Manager V</b>	The planning phase The execution phase
<b>Project Manager VI</b>	The production phase

*Table 9, The occurrence of conflicts during the project life cycle.*

According to Project Manager I and Project Manager III, conflicts within their project teams occurred during the whole project life cycle. However, Project Manager I, Project Manager II and Project Manager V consider that most of the conflicts occur in the planning phase.

Project Manager II and Project Manager IV think that the occurrence of conflict is very common during the implementation phase of the project life cycle. According to Project Manager I, the end of the project life cycle caused many conflicts, i.e., during the time the whole team got together to urge the new systems. He believes that one of the main reasons were because of the disagreements between the people that were involved.

Furthermore, Project Manager V considers that conflicts occurred a lot during the execution phase of the project life cycle. Whereas, Project Manager VI considers that most conflicts occur during the production phase of the project life cycle.

#### 4.4 Conflicts within Multi-Cultural Project Teams

A conflict within a project team is an issue that can not be avoided. Conflicts within multi-cultural teams may sometimes be easily obtained because of the differences between the different cultures within the project teams. Some cultures do not agree with each other as good as other cultures may accomplish.

According to Project Manager I and Project Manager III, conflicts regarding the differences in culture are not anything that they have encountered within their project teams. Project Manager I declares that due to the similar organisational culture across the different countries within his project team the avoidance of misunderstandings and conflicts has been possible. For the reason that project teams that consist of project team members that originates from completely different organisational cultures have more to learn about each others organisational behaviour and norms, than just as ordinary colleague. Project Manager III states that all the project team members within his project team are familiar with each others work environment, which in turn avoids misunderstandings and conflicts.

Project Manager II, Project Manager IV, Project Manager V and Project Manager VI have all encountered conflicts regarding the differences in culture. According to Project Manager II, the issues that differed between the cultures were mainly about the best way to tackle a particular problem. Project Manager IV states that the differences between the cultures were mostly about how to terminate the decision points. Project Manager V declares that the cultural differences were about the different values that each individual obtains from their culture, for instance in some cultures it is naturally to be straightforward, whereas in other cultures it is not acceptable. In some cultures it is naturally to be loud-voiced during a conversation, while other cultures experience that as rude behaviour and so forth. According to Project Manager VI, the issues that differed between the cultures were mostly about the differences in quality, time, finance, health and safety issues.

Project Manager V has experienced that some cultures are not that easy to collaborate with because of the differences in values. He believes that the Swedes are less spontaneous than those from the southern part of Europe. The other participating project managers have not experienced any particular culture to cooperate with. According to Project Manager II, each country/region presents its own problems.

## 4.5 Typical Conflicts within Multi-Cultural Project Teams

Typical conflicts within multi-cultural project teams may differ between the different project teams. Some of the project teams may experience the national issues as more typical than for instance issues such as the resources within a project team.

Project Manager IV states that she has not experienced any typical conflicts within her project team. According to Project Manager I, typical conflicts that have occurred within his project team is because of the different temperaments between the project team members. The manager director from Norway seemed to be more pressured and impatient compared to the other project team members; he sometimes even attacked the project team members without any reason, which either can be seen as a personal or cultural issue. Misunderstandings are also typical conflicts that occurred very often within his team, especially when the project team worked together though phone-communication and electronic communication such as e-mailing. Project Manager II declares that typical conflicts that have occurred within her project team are because of cultural issues, which indicate that individuals' patterns of work/approach to problems/hierarchies etc vary between nationalities. People issues are also contributing to conflict, for the reason that these issues occur between nationalities as much as they can within groups of the same nationalities. She also believes that the distance between the project team members can lead to misunderstandings as well as language can. Even if Organisation II's official language is English the individuals understanding of English can vary, which might cause misunderstandings between the project team members.

Project Manager III declares that typical conflicts that have occurred within his project team are because of the different working styles that distinguish slightly between the different cultures, especially with the Italians. For instance, they forget very fast some decisions that have been decided in earlier meetings, to avoid these kinds of conflicts the project manager consider documentations from earlier meetings as very important, which has become a high priority to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. Project Manager III has also observed that the Swedish team members differ from the Italians when it comes to the perception of time. He have experienced that the Swedish team members are used to work fast and make fast decision, whereas the others are not pressured to the time as much as the Swedish. This in turn can cause frustration among the Swedish team members. Misunderstandings are also issues that sometimes occur, for the reason that some things are obvious for the Swedish, Germans and Belgians, while not for the Italians. Project Manager III believes that it is very important for the project team members to learn to accept that their team members are all different. According to Project Manager V, typical conflicts that have occurred within his project team are because of the differences in values and the way the project members' view problems. He believes that such conflicts arise partly because of misunderstandings between the project team members. Project Manager VI proclaims that typical conflicts that have occurred within his project team are because of the differences in time, finance, quality, different management culture, health and safety.

## 4.6 Conflicts Regarding National Culture

The study of national culture is encouraged by a need for better international understanding and collaboration. This dissertation focuses on national culture during the examination of conflicts within multi-cultural project teams that consist of merely European project team

members. That is, the way the project team members act, behave, and their manner of thinking and feeling. Other issues such as language, religion, values and attitudes, traditions and the aspect of time and its usage are included as a national culture, since these issues are all a part of an individual's cultural background.

#### 4.6.1 Language

In multi-cultural project teams the English language is very often the predominantly language that the majority of the nationalities use when they get together. Even if all the project team members can speak English the mixture of intonation, accents and degree of fluency can present major difficulties to satisfactory communication. Table 9 shows the participating project managers experiences concerning the issue language and its contribution to conflicts and misunderstandings within their project teams.

	<b>Does Language Contribute to Conflicts?</b>
<b>Project Manager I</b>	No
<b>Project Manager II</b>	Rarely
<b>Project Manager III</b>	No
<b>Project Manager IV</b>	Sometimes
<b>Project Manager V</b>	Sometimes
<b>Project Manager VI</b>	Often

*Table 10, The participating project manager's experiences concerning the differences in language and its contribution to conflict within their project teams.*

According to Project Manager I and Project Manager III, language has not been an issue that has caused any conflicts within their project teams. Project Team I consist of only Scandinavian nationalities, the project manager considers the Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) as very similar, which he believes is an exceptional reason for his team to not have encountered such conflicts. According to Project Manager III all the project team members within his project team are all very good in English.

According to Project Manager II, Project Manager IV and Project Manager V, language is sometimes an issue that contributes to conflicts and misunderstandings. Project Manager II proclaims that the 'official' language in their organisation is English, which in turn avoids a lot of misunderstanding and contributes rarely to any conflicts because of the differences in language. According to Project Manager IV, language has caused misunderstandings within her project team, especially during the time they worked in distance. She believes that it therefore is very important to have clear goals, which in turn makes it possible to avoid misunderstandings within the project team. According to Project Manager V, language is sometimes an issue that contributes to misunderstandings, especially when English is not used sufficiently in the culture, mainly due to variances in mastering of the English language, for non-native English speakers.

According to Project Manager VI, language is an issue that contributes to misunderstandings and conflicts, especially when English is not used sufficiently in the culture, mainly due to the variances in mastering the English language, for non-native, for example the Italians.

#### 4.6.2 Religion

Individuals from different nationalities practices different religions. There are several different religions within the European countries, which mostly have been brought to this continent because of the immigrants that have immigrated to Europe from other part of the world.

According to all the participating project managers, religion has not been an issue that has contributed to any conflicts or misunderstandings. Project Manager II and Project Manager V declare that religion is something that they exclude from their working life. If there are any projects team members that do observe some kind of religious practices, they prepare with for example special prayer rooms that they can access when it is needed and some special rules are also prepared to avoid as much conflicts as possible.

#### 4.6.3 Values and Attitudes

Every country has its own culture, with different perceptions and attitudes towards how they do and how they approach methods. That is to say that, every country has its own values and attitudes towards life. Table 10 shows the participating project managers experiences concerning the differences in values and attitudes and its contribution to conflicts and misunderstandings between the project team members.

	<b>Do the Differences in Values and Attitudes Contribute to Conflicts?</b>
<b>Project Manager I</b>	No
<b>Project Manager II</b>	Very Seldom
<b>Project Manager III</b>	No
<b>Project Manager IV</b>	Sometimes
<b>Project Manager V</b>	Sometimes
<b>Project Manager VI</b>	Sometimes

*Table 11, The participating project managers experiences concerning the differences in values and attitudes and its contribution to conflict between the project team members.*

According to Project Manager I and Project Manager III, the differences in values and attitudes between the project team members have not contributed to any conflicts. Project Manager II considers on the other hand that it very seldom contribute to conflicts.

According to Project Manager IV, the differences in values and attitudes may contribute to some conflicts and misunderstandings, for the reason that all people are different even though



they are from the same cultural background and they all have different values and attitudes. Project Manager V considers the differences in values as one of the areas that could contribute to conflicts between the project team members, whereas the differences in attitudes can contribute to misunderstandings when the project team members do not listen to each other sufficiently. According to Project Manager VI, the differences in value and attitudes sometimes contribute to conflict and misunderstandings.

#### 4.6.4 Traditional Behaviour

Every culture has its own traditions, it is therefore very important to understand the behaviour of the others and to avoid as much conflicts as possible. Table 11 shows the participating project managers experiences concerning the differences in traditions and its contribution to conflicts and misunderstandings between the project team members.

	<b>Do the Differences in Traditions Contribute to Conflicts?</b>
<b>Project Manager I</b>	No
<b>Project Manager II</b>	Yes
<b>Project Manager III</b>	No
<b>Project Manager IV</b>	No
<b>Project Manager V</b>	Sometimes
<b>Project Manager VI</b>	Sometimes

*Table 12, The participating project managers experiences concerning the differences in traditions and its contribution to conflict between the project team members.*

According to Project Manager I, Project Manager III and Project Manager IV, the differences in traditions and traditional behaviour have not contributed to any conflicts within their project teams. Project Manager I consider that the project team members showed more respect to each other when they were aware about the cultural differences.

According to Project Manager V and Project Manager VI, the differences in traditions and traditional behaviour sometimes contribute to conflicts and misunderstandings within their project teams.

Project Manager II states that the differences in traditions and traditional behaviour conduct to conflicts, but she have experienced that conflicts that arise because of traditional behaviour do not always have to be a negative thing. Whether it depends on the individuals involved and how the project manager manages the conflict.

#### 4.6.5 The Aspect of Time

The concept of time and its usage is different across individuals from different cultures. The way time can be divided into is also indicative of a particular culture. Table 12 shows the

participating project managers experiences concerning the differences in the aspect of time and its contribution to conflicts and misunderstandings between the project team members.

	<b>Do the Differences in the Aspect of Time Contribute to Conflicts?</b>
<b>Project Manager I</b>	No
<b>Project Manager II</b>	Yes
<b>Project Manager III</b>	Yes
<b>Project Manager IV</b>	No
<b>Project Manager V</b>	Yes
<b>Project Manager VI</b>	Yes

*Table 13, The participating project managers experiences concerning the differences in the aspect of time and its contribution to conflict between the project team members.*

According to Project Manager I and Project Manager IV, the different attitudes towards time and its usage have not contributed to any conflicts or misunderstandings within their project teams.

According to Project Manager II, Project Manager III, Project Manager V and Project Manager VI, the different attitudes towards time and its usage sometimes contribute to conflicts and misunderstandings within their project teams. Project Manager II declares that different attitudes to time between the project team members also influence the relationship between the project team members and the environment. It may cause frustration as individuals feel either under pressure or become frustrated at an apparent lack of progress. Project Manager III states that the different attitudes to time between the different cultures within his project team may cause conflicts because the Italians have the tendency to pull on the time of the discussions, while the Swedish are impatient and want to make a decision as soon as possible. According to Project Manager V, the differences to time and its usage sometimes cause misunderstandings. Misunderstandings concerning the break times differed between the cultures. He considers the Swiss as very punctual and the Swedes as good to keep on schedule, whereas some people from other European countries are at time, not that punctual.

## 4.7 Conflicts Regarding Other Issues

Within multi-cultural project teams the occurrence of conflict and misunderstandings can be caused by a lot of different issues. Conflicts over schedules, priorities, manpower resources, technical issues, administration, costs and personality conflict are all typical conflicts that occur during the entire project life cycle.

Project Manager I, Project Manager II, Project Manager IV, Project Manager V and Project Manager VI have all experienced that these kinds of issues contribute to conflicts. Project Manager I have experienced unexpected costs as an issue that contributes to conflicts with people outside his project team, but that have other interferences within his project team. Project Manager II states that all these are issues that invariably rear the project team

members head when managing a large project. Project Manager IV proclaims that these issues always create misunderstandings and conflicts in her project teams. Project Manager V considers these kinds of conflicts to be quite common and typical in many project teams. Whereas Project Manager III declares that he has not encountered these kinds of conflicts within his project team, but instead with the people outside the project team that do have some interference with his project team.

## 4.8 Conflicts Regarding Technological Communication

Conflicts and misunderstandings regarding electronic and technical communication occur occasionally in virtual global teams because of the work distance. Project Manager I states that the work distances contributed to many misunderstandings, due to the fact that all the project team members do not always understand everything through a phone call or an e-mail. According to Project Manager I, NET-meeting is a method of communication that avoids a lot of misunderstandings. Due to the fact that the entire project team can communicate together, while at the same time have access to the documents, which in turn facilitates for the project team members to express their feelings and thoughts through sketches, questions and other methods.

Project Manager IV and Project Manager V believes that electronic communication contribute to misunderstandings between the project team members. Project Manager IV declares that technological communication contributes to problems, discussions and misunderstandings between the project team members. The different time zones and the unplanned agendas during the meetings through internet or phone calls are all issues that contribute to such problems. Project Manager V thinks that electronic communications such as e-mailing contribute to a lot of misunderstandings, whereas phone- and videoconferencing can reasonably well replace the physical meetings compared with other technological communication.

Project Manager II and Project Manager III do not consider electronic and technical communication as an issue that contribute to conflicts. Project Manager II declares that the employees are well served by IT etc in their business. Conference callings are the most usable technique that they use more and more within the project team. Whereas Project Manager III considers that the long working relationship that the project team members have had with each other avoids a lot of conflicts and misunderstandings.

Project Manager VI does not have any comments, because he is leading an intercultural team and not a virtual global team. Technologic communications is not used that often when the project team members meet up in face-to-face meeting almost every day.

Face-to-face meeting is something that all the participating project team members prefer, instead of electronic and technical communication. Even though Project Manager I consider net-meetings as very effective, the face-to-face meetings are seen as even more effective. For the reason that the conversations between the project team members are easier in face-to-face meetings, which in turn avoids a lot of misunderstandings and conflicts. Project Manager II states that although conference callings avoid many misunderstandings, it is still very important for the project team members to meet up in face-to-face meetings. When the project team members are based in different countries, there are times when they have to be gathered in the same room. She thinks that even if language is an issue, the availability of non-verbal

clues really helps to bridge the gaps. If this can be combined with a social event, e.g. a meal together in the evening, then the benefits increase. Project Manager III declares that even if the use of technical communication is so well functioned, he thinks that the face-to-face meetings facilitate for the project team members to communicate with each other. He therefore prefers face-to-face meetings, instead of technological contact. Project Manager V prefers face-to-face meetings instead of technological communication when feasible/possible, due to the fact that he considers the body language as very important. Project Manager IV prefers face-to-face meetings because the different time zones and the unplanned agendas during the meetings through internet or phone calls are issues that contribute misunderstandings and problems.

## 4.9 Positive and Negative Consequences of Conflicts

The consequences of conflicts do not always have to be something bad for the project teams, it does have positive influence on the project team members as well as bad influence. According to Project Manager I, positive conflict can be seen as a good training for the project managers to learn handle conflicts better. Project Manager II states that the positive consequences that she have experienced is that it encourage people to think in ways they have not thought before, produces new feasible options that everyone can buy into and helping to build a better team if handled well. The positive consequence that Project Manager III has experienced is that the project team members get to know each other better when conflicts occur. If conflicts do not occur, he does not believe that the project team members get familiar with the problems within the project team and the conflicts will never get solved. According to Project Manager IV, the discussions between the members of the project have a positive affect on the project team members, but she have not experienced that conflicts have an positive affect on the project team. Project Manager V considers that when conflict could not be avoided, it sometimes contributes to positive consequences such as; encouraging the project team members to find new feasible solutions to an existing problem, to clarify their role within the project team and to clarify their responsibility. Project Manager VI considers that conflict sometimes contributes to positive consequences, especially when the project team members get the opportunity to brainstorm over their present situation that causes the conflicts.

All the participating project managers agree that conflicts do have negative consequences on the project team, except for Project Manager IV. She believes that conflicts very seldom contribute to negative consequences. Project Manager I thinks that a negative effect of conflict occurs when the project team members lose their interest of collaborating with each other in future project team tasks or business. Project Manager II considers that a negative effect of conflict occur when it makes the project team members feel that their views are incorrect. They can feel angry or excluded or become entrenched in their views, none of these cases are positive for the project team or the individuals that are involved. According to Project Manager III, a negative effect of conflict occur especially when there are issues that the project team members cannot get along with each other and complete a conflict where the project team members are dissatisfied. Project Manager V thinks that negative effects of conflicts could hurt people and it can also decrease their motivation and so forth. According to Project Manager VI, too much conflict at once is a negative effect on the project team because the time pressure is an issue that delays the task because of problem solving, which in turn contribute to a negative effect on both the project team an the people that are involved.

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## 5. DISCUSSION

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The following section presents a discussion concerning a more deeply view of the results from the empirical research, with reflections to the theoretical framework. The analysis from the interviews revealed significant differences between the data that was collected from the literature review and the interviews with the participating experienced project managers.

### 5.1 The Occurrence of Conflicts during the Project Life Cycle

Conflicts arise differently depending on which occupation the project team work within. Some researchers (Mantel & Meredith, 2003; Thamhain & Wilemon, 1975; Verma, 1996) declare that most of the conflicts that occur within a project team take place in the planning phase, since this phase normally involve interaction of various people with different skills and background where they for the first time settle down with each other. Three of the participating project managers consider the planning phase as the phase of the project life cycle where the occurrence of conflicts is the most. Whereas, two of these project managers also considers the implementation and execution phase to be the phase which conflicts occur as much as in the planning phase. Another one of the participating project managers thought as the other two, that the implementation phase causes most of the conflicts during the whole project life cycle. The implementations phase is the phase when the entire project team needs to collaborate and communicate with each other to manage to achieve the goal of the project team. In virtual global teams the project team members work in distance, which means that they all work separately in their own location and collaborate just when it is needed. These three project managers are all leading virtual global teams, which can be one of the reasons that they experience the implementations phase as the phase when the occurrence of conflicts is the most. This because as mentioned earlier, that the project team members probably need to collaborate and communicate with each other more than earlier phases during the project life cycle. Project Team IV is one of the project teams that experience the occurrence of conflicts most during the implementation phase. The project team is divided into many different parties, which make the implementation phase to more complex than the planning phase. The implementation phase is the time when all the different parties within the project team meet up, the team members do not know each other as well as the ones within their parties, which therefore contribute to several conflicts and misunderstandings. Project Team VI is a construction organisation which perhaps has more complications during the production phase than the planning phase, due to the differences in skills and education between the project team members from the different cultures.

The other two participating project managers had all different opinions, one believed that the production phase was the phase that most of the conflicts occurred and the other believed that conflicts occurs the same during the whole project life cycle. These results can have many different outcomes; there is no answer to why the participating project managers think different. It completely depends on the type of project team that they lead or the understandings that they have experienced during the project life cycle. Project Manager III declared that conflicts occurs the same during the whole project life cycle. One of the reasons

to his answer may be that the project team is still present, they have not experienced all the different phases yet and that it is a long-termed task, which includes several years.

## 5.2 Conflicts within Multi-Cultural Project Teams

Researching relating to multi-cultural co-operations has become an important research topic; due to the increased globally co-operations of the organisations and to the differences in cultures (Walsh, 2004). In international operations, it is complicated, if not impossible, to establish rules that people from all cultures in the world will abide to. It is the differences between the cultures that increase the conflicts and misunderstandings between the people that are involved within a multi-cultural project team (Reuvid & Young, 2003). Four of the participating project managers have all encountered conflicts regarding the differences in culture. They all had different thoughts about what reasons caused these conflicts in their project teams. It mostly had to do with the differences between the cultures and the different behaviour and thoughts that every individual attain from its culture.

Project Manager I and Project Managers III do not think that the cultural differences within their project teams is the main reason for the occurrence of interpersonal conflicts. They believe that one of the reasons could be that their project team members are familiar with each others work environment, which in turn make them to respect and understand the different behaviours and actions of the project team members. Stephens (2002) declares that the different countries within Europe have different ways of reacting and thinking. Whereas not as obvious and extreme as cultural differences with for instance Asia. The cultural differences within Europe are powerful and significant, but when issues are not understood, it can lead to misunderstandings and confusion within the project teams (Stephens, 2002). Project Team I consists of only Scandinavian project team members, which also can be a reason, because the cultural differences between Project Team I is not that massive as the other participating project teams. When comparing different cultures the scholars uses Northern Europeans or the Scandinavians as the same culture and compare it therefore with other cultures. If it would have been great cultural differences the scholars would have used each country separately during an investigation.

## 5.3 Typical Conflicts within Multi-Cultural Project Teams

According to Solomon (1998), both the intercultural project teams and the virtual global teams, have enormous challenges which cause interpersonal conflicts because of the differences in the cultures (Solomon, 1998). Intercultural project teams encounter conflicts because of the differences in language, values and attitudes, way of communication, religion, traditional behaviour, the aspect of time and its usage. Misunderstandings between the project team members are therefore easily attained. There are many reasons for the occurrence of such misunderstandings, for the reason that members of multi-cultural project teams are sometimes not able to express themselves because of the variances of mastering the official language, which in turn lead to conflicts (Duarte & Snyder, 2001). According to Cohen and Gibson (2003), the reflections concerning communications within a virtual global team that work asynchronous may take much longer time than in a project team that works synchronous. Conflicts occur within virtual global teams because of challenges in communication through technology, which can lead to many misunderstanding especially

when there are differences in language (Cohen & Gibson, 2003). Three of the participating project managers consider the electronic and technologic communication to be a reason that causes many misunderstandings, which mostly depend on the differences in language.

Conflicts regarding national issues are also one of the main reasons for the occurrence of conflicts within multi-cultural project teams. Issues such as language, way of communicating with each other, values and attitudes, religion, traditional behaviour, the aspect and the usage of time, environment, peoples cultural differences action and the differences about personal space (Barsoux & Schneider, 1997; Burgess & Enhassi, 1990; Manari & Manari, 1995, Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds, 1998; Verma, 1997). The participating project managers have different opinions regarding what the typical conflicts are that occur within their multi-cultural project teams. Five of the six participating project managers, which corresponds 83 percent of the sample, believe that the national issues within multi-cultural project teams contribute to interpersonal conflicts. This indicates that national issues are the main reasons for the occurrence of conflicts and misunderstandings between the project team members within any multi-cultural project team.

Project Manager II considers language as an issue that causes misunderstandings. She also considers the cultural issues as the basis for typical conflicts within multi-cultural project teams. This means that individual's patterns of work/approach to problems/hierarchies etc vary between the different nationalities. People issues are also contributing to conflict, because these occur between nationalities as much as they can within groups of the same nationalities. Project Manager III has experienced the different working styles that distinguish slightly between the different cultures, especially with the Italians are very typical and causes misunderstandings and some conflicts within his project team. He has also experienced that the aspect of time and its usage differ between the different cultures that are involved within his project team. Project Manager V considers the differences in values and the way the project members' view problems are national issues that cause conflicts within his project team. Project Manager VI proclaims that typical conflicts concerning national issues that have occurred within his project team are because of the differences in different management culture and the aspect of time and it usage. He also believes that other issues such as finance, quality, health and safety are also typical conflicts within his project teams.

Project Manager IV is the only one that has not experienced any typical conflicts within her project teams. One of the reasons could be that her project team is both working synchronous and a synchronous, which may have caused different issues that have contributed to interpersonal conflicts, which in turn makes it hard for her to specify certain issues to be typical.

## 5.4 Conflicts Regarding National Issues

Conflicts concerning national issues occur when for instance project teams consist of project team members that originate from different countries and have different cultural meditation, behaviour, values and traditions (Storti, 2001). All the participating project teams within the empirical research of this dissertation consist of project team members that originate from merely European countries. Previous investigations have compared cultures such as; Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe (Spain and Italy), Latin America, Asia (Japan and China), Middle East, the United States, Australia, Canada and Africa. For instance, Burgess and Enhassi (1990) compared different cultural issues regarding the

differences in national issues between the Middle East and the United States, Verma (1997) have compared Northern Europe with the United States and many other investigations with other cultures. Manrai and Manrai, (1995) have compared low-context countries (i.e. Western Europe and United States) with low context countries (i.e. Asia, Middle East, South America). Many more examinations have been made regarding the differences in national culture between different cultures, but unfortunately not a lot of examinations have been made regarding the differences in national culture between the different European cultures. All the participating project managers are raised in European countries and their project teams consist of European project team members. The sections below compares the differences between earlier investigations and the results from the empirical research in this dissertation concerning the issue; if there is a relation between the type of conflicts that occur within multi-cultural project teams with merely European members and multi-cultural project teams with a mixture of cultures from all over the world.

According to some researchers (Barsoux & Schneider, 1997; Burgess & Enhassi, 1990; Manari & Manari, 1995, Reynolds, 1998; Verma, 1997), typical conflicts concerning the national issues that occur within multi-cultural project teams arise due to the differences in language, religion, values and attitudes, traditional behaviour, the aspect of time, environment, peoples cultural differences action, way of communication and the differences about personal space. The issues concerning the people's cultural differences in action, about personal space and the environment are issues that all the participating project managers have not mentioned anything about. This may depend on the similarities between the European cultures, for instance, when Verma (1997) compares the different cultures with each other, he prefers to compare cultures that originate from different continents and not from the same.

#### 5.4.1 Language and Communication

According to Bloch and Starks (1999), most of the intercultural communications or negotiations between individuals with different cultural backgrounds involve communications in a language other than their mother tongue. The most common languages that are used in multi-cultural co-operations are Malaya, Swahili, Arabic and English. The English language is the most common language within European co-operations, due to the fact that some of the countries within Europe have the prospect to practice English in a very high business level (Bloch & Starks, 1999). Three of the participating project managers have encountered conflicts and misunderstandings because of the differences in language. Project Manager IV and Project Manager V declare that they sometimes come across misunderstanding or conflicts because of the differences in language, while Project Manager VI declares that he often encounter conflicts within his project team. Project Manager IV declares that the technical and electronic communication contributes to misunderstandings in the communication and the language between the project team members, which in turn makes it impossible to avoid conflicts. Whereas both Project Manager V and Project Manager VI believes, that the variances in mastering the English language is causing conflicts.

According to Brett (2001), language is an issue that needs to be addressed because it interferes with information that is shared by the people who are involved. Language is a powerful tool but it can at the same time be a source of misunderstandings, frustration and anger. For instance, even if world-wide organisations uses English as their organisational language, misunderstandings occur due to the variances in how the people who are involved command the English language. It becomes frustrating and anger arises when for example



project team members use a foreign language in the work place and do not manage to express their feelings and thoughts (Brett, 2001). Three of the participating project managers did not think that language contributed to any misunderstandings or conflicts. Project Team I consisted of project team members from only Scandinavian countries. The project manager believed that the similarities between the different languages facilitated the communication between the project team members, which in turn avoided misunderstandings and conflicts. Project Team III consisted of high educated project team members that have known each other since 1998. Project Manager III believed that the long-termed relationship between the project team members and their highly-qualified degrees are issues that have smoothed the progress of misunderstanding and conflicts. Project Manager II declares that she has rarely encountered conflicts or misunderstandings within her project team, for the reason that their organisation has English as their official language. All the participating countries within her project team command the English language at a high business level.

Several researchers (Berbyuk, 2005; Hofstede, 2001; Tayeb, 1998, Verma, 1997 and many more) declares that different cultures can be separated from one another by the way the individuals within the same culture communicate with each other and exchange information among themselves, to the concept of low-context and high-context cultures. Low-context cultures include cultures such as; Scandinavians, Swiss, Germans, Northern Europeans and Americans, whereas high-context cultures include cultures such as; Arabs, Japanese and Mediterranean people (Tayeb, 1998). The background information within the high-context cultures is implicit, whereas the background information within low-context cultures is explicit. Figure 7 illustrates the cultures that belong to the low-context cultures versus the high-context cultures (Berbyuk, 2005).

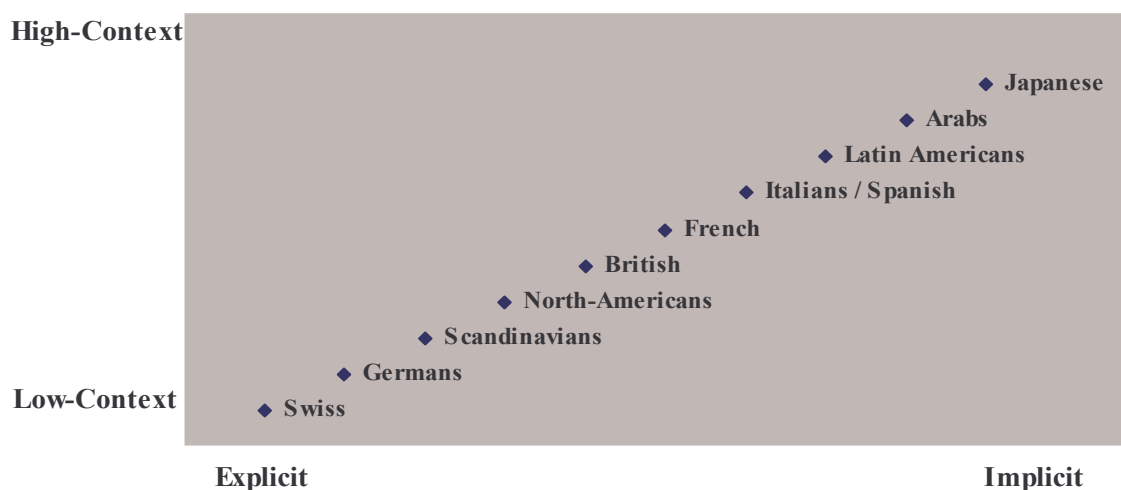


Figure 7, High-context versus low-context cultures (Berbyuk, 2005).

Figure 7 shows that the communication within Europe is separated to some extent from one another. This can be a reason for the foundation of the occurrence of conflicts and misunderstandings within Project Team IV, Project Team V and Project Team VI. All these project teams consist of a variety of cultures from both low-context cultures and high-context cultures, such as Scandinavians, Germans, Swiss from the low-context cultures and Italians and Spanish from the high-context cultures. Project Team I only consist of Scandinavian cultures, which possibly is one of the reasons to not have encountered conflicts or misunderstandings concerning the diminutive differences in language and the way of

communication. According to Cohen and Gibson (2003), the communication within virtual global teams is often more explicit, which therefore may avoid the common problem of misunderstandings that creates in the less explicit forms of communication (Cohen & Gibson, 2003). Almost all the participating project teams are virtual global teams, which in turn can be one of the reasons that they did not mention conflicts or misunderstanding concerning the way they communicated with each other.

#### 5.4.2 Religion

Religion is a tradition which exists in most of the human cultures, albeit in different forms (Tayeb, 1998). Lientz and Rea (2003) declare that religion is a factor that exists in any society, which affect the way people view their life and attitudes of workers towards work (Lientz & Rea, 2003), and it also affects eating habits, dress, punctuality and work site (Verma, 1997). Therefore, it becomes very important for the project managers to acquire the ability and experiences to work with people with different beliefs. The different religions within a multi-cultural project team is therefore one of the main reasons to the contribution of conflicts. The results from this empirical research indicates that none of the participating project managers considered the differences in religion as an issue that have contributed to conflicts within their project teams. These results may depend on many different sources. According to Symmonds (2002), the majority of the Europeans have the Christianity and the Judaism as their religion. This can be one of the sources that the participating project teams have not encounter conflicts concerning the differences in religion. Another source according to Lewis (2003) is that the Westerns prefer to separate religion from work, whereas for instance, most Islamic countries do not. Both Project Manager II and Project Manager V clarified that religion is an issue that they exclude from their work environment.

According to Charvat (2002), every project managers should learn to use the most appropriate course of action to resolve these types of conflicts that arise within their project teams. Some of the participating project manager mentioned that if there are any project team members that observe some kind of religious practice, they always make sure to prepare with e.g. special prayer rooms that they can access when it is needed and sometimes they even add new rules that are adapted to the project team. This in turn avoids many conflicts and misunderstandings between the project team members, which can be another source for not encountering conflicts concerning the differences in religion.

#### 5.4.3 Values and Attitudes

Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1997) declare that values determine the definition of what is bad and good within a culture. When people from different cultures are working together for instance within a project teams, conflicts and misunderstandings may arise due to the differences in the cultural values. The cultural values direct the individuals to the behaviour that is aspired and desired by their culture (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997). According to Clements and Jones (2002), an attitude develops by individuals, small groups, communities and populations. A commonly held attitude within a group develop a group of culture, i.e., every culture distinguish their selves by their own attitudes (Clements & Jones, 2002). According to Berbyuk (2005), the three components; values, beliefs and norms, are the key to the way people within the same culture think about the world and orientate themselves. Values and attitudes are national issues that differ between different cultures.

These differences affect the way people behave and act, and if there are for instance many different nationalities working within the same project team conflicts and misunderstandings may arise because of the differences in values and attitudes. Three of the participating project managers believe that the differences in values and attitudes between the different cultures sometimes contribute to conflict. These are all project teams that consist of a variety of European countries, from the Eastern, Western, Southern and Northern parts of Europe, which may differ more concerning the differences in attitudes and values between the cultures than the other participating project teams.

Whereas, the remaining three of the participating project managers do not think that the differences in values and attitudes between the cultures contribute to conflicts between the project team members. This may depend on several things, but in Project Team I all the participating cultures within the project team are Scandinavians, which indicates that the cultures are very much the same. Project Team II may have a strict organisational culture that all the people involved are familiar with and have learned to adapt to. Another reason could be that some of the project team members knew each other before this project teams started up. Project Team III is long-termed project team, and one reason can be that the project team members have known each other for a long time now, and that the differences in values and attitudes is not an obstacle for the project team members.

#### 5.4.4 Traditional Behaviour

Traditional behaviour is derived from the shared components of values, beliefs and norms of each culture (Berbyuk, 2005). Traditions are formed by a group of people that share the same culture and originate from the same country (Brewster, Mayrhofer & Morley, 2000). Conflicts regarding the differences within a multi-cultural project team may occur for the reason that the traditional behaviour influences the individual's behaviour and create a national behaviour which may differ between individuals from other nationalities.

Three of the participating project managers have not experienced conflicts concerning the differences in traditional behaviour, whereas the remaining three participating project managers have experienced such conflicts between the project team members. This may depend on the amount of mixtures of the different nationalities within the project team or on how considerable the differences are between the different cultures that are involved. The project teams that have not experienced any conflicts regarding the differences in traditional behaviour do not have more than four different nationalities within the project teams and some of the participating cultures are similar. Some of the project team members knew each other from earlier co-operations, which perhaps facilitate the ongoing co-operations, for the reason that they already have learned some of the characteristic traditional behaviours. The project teams that have experienced conflicts concerning the differences in traditional behaviour had at least four different nationalities in each project team, which all are very dissimilar and also from many different parts of Europe.

#### 5.4.5 The Aspect of Time

According to Gootnick and Gootnick (2000), people from different countries have different attitudes towards time and its usage. Hodge (2000) declare that the awareness of time is ingrained in the natural rhythm of a countries national life. The responses and attitudes

towards time differ widely from country to country. For instance the Turkish do not mind if a project team members is late, because they believe that important people come late. The Italians are constantly late, the Spanish are very relaxed and do not mind to be late, in Germany everyone have to be one time and the Swedish prefer to be on place fifteen minutes earlier to ensure that they will arrive on time (Hodge, 2000). Four of the participating project managers have experienced conflicts because of the different attitudes towards time. The results from the empirical research appear that the Southern Europeans seemed to be very relaxed to the usage and aspect of time, i.e. they are frequently late to meetings, while the Northern Europeans are seemed to be very punctual. There are also some European countries that are on time but not as punctual as for instance the Swiss.

The remaining two project managers did not think that the different attitudes towards time contributed to any conflicts between the project team members. This may depend on the mixture of nationalities within the two project teams. Both Project Team I and Project Team IV consist of project team members that only originates from the Northern parts of Europe, which may not differ as much compared with the Southern, Western and Eastern European countries. As mentioned before, Project Team I only consist of Scandinavians, which in most of the investigation are considered as the same cultural background.

## 5.5 Conflicts Regarding Other Issues

Conflicts within multi-cultural project teams occur because of many reasons than just the national issues. According to Thamhain and Wilemon (1975) conflicts regarding schedules, priorities, manpower, technical issues, administration, costs and personality are all issues that due cause conflicts in any project teams and not just multi-cultural project teams.

Five of the participating project managers have experienced some of these conflicts within their project teams. The size, the resources and the duration of the project teams can be a reason that these issues do have an affect on the project teams' achievements. One of the participating project managers have not encountered conflicts regarding these issues within his project team, but instead with people outside his project team that did have some interference with his project team. There are no specific reasons, but the little amount of project team members and the long duration of the project life cycle may be reasons for his respond.

## 5.6 Conflicts Regarding Technological Communication

According to Cohen and Gibson (2003), the complexity of today's technology in communication influences the project team members both negatively and positively. Five of the participating project teams are virtual global teams, which imply that they all are cooperating with each other through electronic and technical communication. Three of those five project teams have all encountered some kinds of conflicts and misunderstandings because of the technological communications. Cohen and Gibson (2003) declare that the negative effects of technological communication are those that sometimes contribute to misunderstandings and conflicts between the project team members. The negative affects are that some project team members may have access to electronic communication only during certain hours of the day. There are different norms in the different cultures for how often

project team members should check in for messages by voice mail, e-mail, and an answering service. The differences between the cultures that are involved may contribute to silence and lack of responses to communications by technology, which can have numerous meanings across contexts, represented on virtual teams. Those include indifference, discomfort, technical failure, misunderstandings or confusion, which in turn can lead to interpersonal conflicts. Other disadvantages with virtual global teams are technology failures, communication mishaps, dysfunctional conflict, inefficient work processes, and challenges to support systems (Cohen & Gibson, 2003). According to the participating project managers the differences in mastering the official language, the different time zones and the unplanned agendas through electronic or technologic meetings contribute to misunderstandings, problems and conflicts between the project team members.

Virtual global teams are either working synchronous or asynchronous. According to Duarte and Snyder (2001), virtual global teams that work synchronous uses desktop and real-time data conferencing, electronic meeting systems, electronic displays, video conferencing and audio conferencing, as methods of communications and collaborations with each other. While, virtual global teams that work asynchronous uses e-mail, group calendars and schedules, bulleting boards and Web pages, non-real-time database sharing and conferencing, and workflow applications as methods of communication and collaborations with each other (Duarte & Snyder, 2001). Many European project teams are virtual teams, with participants located in different locations. The communication between the project team members performs through e-mail, conference call, video-conference, or technologies such as Net-Meeting and Intranet Chat Rooms, as well as by face-to-face meetings (Stephens, 2002). Four of the participating project teams are virtual global teams, while one of the participating project teams is an intercultural team. The last participating project team is a mixture of both intercultural team and a virtual global team. The project teams that are virtual global teams differ regarding their methods of working together. Two of the participating virtual project teams work asynchronous most of the time, except during the time they urge the systems or when they meet up face-to-face. One of the participating virtual project teams work synchronous, whereas the other remaining two virtual global teams work both synchronous and asynchronous depending on their time schedules in the different countries. The project teams that have encountered conflicts concerning the electronic and technical communication are one of the teams that work asynchronous and the two that work both synchronous and asynchronous. These results can have many different terminations, but the most probable solution is that these results depend very much on the project team members' technological equipment and the accessibility to it. The NET-meeting system is appreciated and recommended by all its users, and if a project team does not have access to such a system than the electronic and technologic communication may cause a lot of misunderstandings and conflicts between the project team members compared with those who use this system.

Earlier studies have illustrated that the technological communication contributes to conflicts. Only one of the participating project managers believes that technological communication contribute to conflicts, discussions and misunderstandings. While two of the participating project managers consider technological communication to be a basis of the occurrence of misunderstandings and not conflicts within their project teams. Project Manager I and Project Manager V use e-mail, phone-calls and NET-meeting, phone- and video-conferencing when the project team members need to communication with each other. They consider the communication through e-mail as an issue that contributes too many misunderstandings, while NET-meeting, phone- and video-conferencing can reasonably replace the physical meetings compared with the other technical communication.

The remaining two project managers that are leading virtual global teams do not consider technological communication as an issue that contribute to conflicts within their project teams. The new technologic such as conference callings, NET-meetings and video conferencing are all very comprehensive methods that can avoid misunderstandings and conflicts between the project team members.

Even though some of the technical methods that are almost as good as face-to-face meetings, all the participating project managers prefer to meet up in face-to-face meeting instead of working in distance with each other. For the reason that they all believe that the face-to-face meetings facilitate the communication between the project team members. Another statement is that if language is an issue, the availability of non-verbal clues and the body language really helps to bridge the gaps.

## 5.7 Positive and Negative Consequences of Conflicts

Many researchers have proved that conflicts do not always have to be a bad thing for the project team members (Chowdhury, 2004; Dora, Guerra, Martinez & Medina 2005; Edelman, 1993; Esquivel & Kleiner, 1997; Flannes & Levin, 2001; Kliem, 2004; Hack, 2004; Ohbushi & Suzuki, 2003; Rahim, 2001). They all confirm that conflicts do have positive outcomes as well as negative outcomes. All the participating project managers agree that conflicts do have positive outcomes on the project team members, but not all agreed that conflicts do have negative outcomes. Five of the six participating project managers believe that conflicts have negative outcomes on the project team members.

The participating project managers did mention some of the positive and negative factors that some of the scholars have established, while some of their factors were new. The new factors concerning positive consequences were issues such as;

- Good training for both the project managers and the project team members to learn handle conflicts better.
- A conflict could compel the project team members closer to each other.

The new factors concerning the bad consequences were issues such as;

- That the participating project managers may feel that their views are incorrect, and feel excluded or become entrenched in their views.
- It can delay their task, because of problem solving.

These different factor or new factor that the participating project managers mentioned may depend on the differences between co-operations within organisations and co-operations within multi-cultural project teams.

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## 6. CONCLUSION

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The following section will present the conclusions from the data, previous research and the results gathered from the empirical research.

### 6.1 Research Termination

Conflict is a natural aspect of any project team. Since many present project teams have people involved from all different parts of the world, it becomes very important to identify cultural differences, which may have to be bridged when carrying out such project teams (Globerson, Shimizu & Zwikael, 2005). The fundamental principle for an international business is to understand the nature and influences of a culture. The project teams or organisations that are the greatest to manage, identify and reconcile cultural differences, or even exploit them to their profit, are possible to obtain an obvious competitive advantage in the marketplace (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999).

After comparing the results from the empirical research with previous research the author of this dissertation can determine that the national issues are the main reasons for the occurrence of conflicts within multi-cultural project teams. Religion is the only national-issue that has not been a reason for any occurrence of conflicts within the involved European multi-cultural project teams. This may depend on the similarities of beliefs within the different European cultures; within this examination there were fifteen different countries involved which all have the Christianity as their main religion. An additional issue can be as Lewis (2003) proclaims that the Westerns prefer to separate the religion from the work, whereas for instance, most Islamic countries do not. The involved project managers seemed to be well prepared for the religious differences, if the project teams consisted of other religious team members than Christians.

Many worldwide leading organisations have English as their organisational language. According to several scholars (Bloch & Starks, 1999; Brett, 2000; Burgess & Enhassi, 1990; and other), language is an issue that contributes to conflicts within multi-cultural project teams. The results from this empirical research with project managers that are leading project teams with merely European members' indicated that language is not always an obstacle and do not often contribute to conflict. Some European countries have proved that they can command the English language in a professional and high educated level. The organisations that have English as their official language avoids many misunderstandings between the project team members. Europeans, especially Scandinavians and Northern Europeans have proved that they are very good in mastering the English language, which is one of the reasons that only 50 percent of the participating project managers consider language as an issue that contribute to conflicts.

The differences in values and attitudes, traditional behaviour and the aspect and usage of time are all issues that contribute to conflicts within the majority of the participating project teams. Some project team members easily learn to adapt to the new environment while some need

longer time to adapt. Some countries within Europe that are neighbours may not be as different as a country from the northern part of Europe compared with a country from the southern part of Europe. Another occasion can be that some of the worldwide organisations that collaborate with their organisations in other countries share the same organisational culture. This indicates that the cultures that are involved within these co-operations understand each other better, for the reason that they behave and act almost as the other project team members. Picot (2002) proclaims that factors such as national issues are all significantly influenced by corporate culture. If the cooperated project team members share similar culture, then it will only be a few obstacles to reach a successful level. The differences between the cultures can easily become obstacles in multi-cultural project teams (Picot, 2002).

The technological communication is also an issue that contributes to conflicts between the project team members. The majority of the participating virtual global teams had encountered conflicts concerning the technological communication, whereas a few had not. According to the participating project managers that had not encountered such conflicts conveyed that the NET-meeting system is almost as good as face-to-face meetings. They consider the NET-meeting system as an exceptional method to use, for the reason that it avoids a lot of misunderstandings and conflicts between the project team members. Despite this effective system all the participating project managers consider face-to-face meetings as a method to avoid most conflicts and misunderstandings between the project team members than working through technical and electronic communication.

According to many researchers (Chowdhury, 2004; Dora, Guerra, Martinez & Medina 2005; Edelman, 1993; Esquivel & Kleiner, 1997; Flannes & Levin, 2001; Hack, 2004; Kliem, 2004; Ohbushi & Suzuki, 2003; Rahim, 2001), conflicts do not always have to be a bad thing for the project team members. Conflicts within multi-cultural project teams have both negative and positive consequences. The results from the empirical research proved that the participating project managers had the same opinions, but the differences where that they had encountered different consequences of both positive and negative factors. The different factor or new factor that the participating project managers mentioned may depend on the differences between co-operations within organisations and co-operations within multi-cultural project teams.

The conclusion of this research is that conflicts occur within European project teams because of the differences in the national issues between the different cultures, but not as much as a project team with members from the different continents of the world. Some European countries do not separate as much concerning the differences in national issues, which therefore facilitate the co-operations between the different cultures. The northern countries of Europe are those who separate most from the southern countries, but still not as much as countries from other continents.

## 6.2 Weaknesses of the Study

The interviews that were performed in face-to-face meeting, gave the most detailed answers to the questions during the interviews. While the e-mail interviews just gave superficial answers, which is a reason for why some of the sections in the part of the results are less detailed with examples and reflections than other parts. Only six project managers were willing to participate in this empirical research. An improved research would be, to have a



larger amount of project managers that are willing to participate in face-to-face meeting. Phone call interviews and e-mail interviews are not as comprehensive as face-to-face meetings. In e-mail interviews the interviewee can write down brief answers because of lack of interest or lack of time, whereas in phone call interviews the interviewee usually give more detailed answers than just a yes or a no.

Issues such as conflict and culture are extremely wide; it is therefore hard to include all possible information. The author of this report focused on national issues that cause interpersonal conflicts within multi-cultural project teams with merely European project team members. Earlier researchers have compared cultures such as; Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe (Spain and Italy), Latin America, Asia (Japan and China), Middle East, the United States, Australia, Canada and Africa. Unfortunately not a lot of the examinations have been made regarding the differences in national culture between the different European cultures, which have almost been impossible to find studies with a comparison of the differences within national issues between European cultures. The earlier comparisons that have been made are with multi-cultural project teams that consist of project team members from all parts of the world.

### 6.3 Future Research

This research was based on the occurrence of conflicts within multi-cultural project teams with merely European project team members.

For future research it would be interesting to observe if there are any significant differences in the occurrence of conflicts. More specifically, to accomplish a research that analyse the differences between multi-cultural project teams where all the participating members have been trained though a cultural training program and project teams that have not been to a cultural training program. Many scholars mention cultural training and it would be interesting to find out if it makes a major difference if the project team gets trained before the project teams starts off. Another suggestion of an interesting future research would be to compare the similarities and the differences of what the typical conflicts are concerning national issues between European project teams and intercultural project teams.

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## APPENDIX I – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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### Interviews – Part I

Gender:

Age:

Your cultural background:

The name of the company you work for:

The size of the company you work for:

The size of the project team you work in:

How long is the project life cycle, i.e., the duration of the project team?

Do the members of the project know each other from earlier collaborations?

What is the mixture of nationalities that are involved in your project team?

### Interviews – Part II

Does the project team members meet face-to-face (Intercultural teams) or do they live in separate locations where they meet through technologic instruments (virtual team)?

**A question for Virtual Teams:** Are they collaborating in real-time, i.e., work during the same work hours (synchronous) or do they work during different times (asynchronous)?

Are there any typical types of conflict that occur among the project members of a multi-cultural project team?

- If yes, what are the typical types of conflicts that occur among the project members within a multi-cultural project team?

A project has a life cycle that includes four phases; definition phase, planning phase, implementation phase and phase out. In what phase of a multi-cultural project team do you think conflicts occur most?

Have you experienced a situation where you have cooperated with persons from a different culture and you have had completely different ideas about things?

If such a situation, what are the issues that differ so much?

Have you experienced a particular difficult culture to cooperate with?

Is language an issue that contributes to conflict within a multi-cultural project team with European members?

Is religion an issue that contributes to conflict within project teams with members from Europe?

Does the difference in value and attitude between the project members contribute to conflict between the employees that are involved within the project?

Every culture has their own traditions, have you experienced that traditional behaviour contributes to conflicts between the project members?

Is the concept of time and its usage different across individuals in different cultures?

- If yes, does it contribute to conflict?

**Just in case, they have not mentioned anything about this before!** Have you encountered conflicts over schedule, over cost, over manpower resources and over administrative procedure within a multi-cultural project team?

Do you think that conflict can contribute to positive things within a multi-cultural project team?

- If yes, what are the positive things that are good for the multi-cultural project team?

What negative things does conflict contribute to within a multi-cultural project team?

**A question for Virtual teams:** Are technological conflicts typically conflicts that arise within project teams that collaborate with project members that are located in different locations?

- If yes, which issues contribute to conflict?

Do you think that face-to-face meeting decreases the misunderstanding and the conflicts between the project members?