Culture Shock as a Barrier to Intercultural Business Communication

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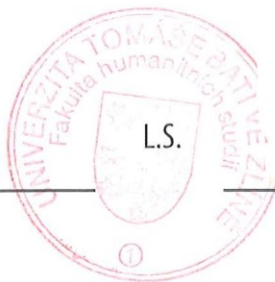
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ABSTRAKT

Bakalářská práce se zabývá kulturním šokem jako bariérou v interkulturní obchodní komunikaci. Práce je rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část. Teoretická část vysvětluje pojmy jako kultura, interkulturní komunikace a interkulturní kontakt. Jsou taktéž objasněny pojmy kulturní dimenze a bariéry interkulturní komunikace. Důraz je kladen zejména na kulturní šok, včetně jeho stádií a symptomů. Praktická část popisuje a porovnává vybrané krajiny v rámci jejich ekonomických a kulturních aspektů a zahrnuje primární výzkum ve formě dotazníku. Hlavním cílem práce je, na základě výsledků výzkumu, poskytnout doporučení na eliminaci kulturního šoku během interkulturních služebních cest.

Klíčová slova: kultura, interkulturní obchodní komunikace, interkulturní kontakt, kulturní dimenze, kulturní šok

ABSTRACT

The Bachelor thesis deals with culture shock as a barrier to intercultural business communication. The thesis is divided into theoretical and practical parts. The theoretical part describes terms such as culture, intercultural communication, and intercultural contact. Cultural dimensions and barriers to intercultural communication are explained. The main focus is placed on culture shock, including its stages and symptoms. The practical part describes and compares selected countries in terms of their economic and cultural aspects. Primary research in the form of a questionnaire is included. Based on the research results, the main goal of the thesis is to provide recommendations on culture shock elimination during intercultural business trips.

Keywords: culture, intercultural business communication, intercultural contact, cultural dimensions, culture shock

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In a time of globalisation characterised by increased mass travel, growing number of immigrants and refugees, organizations going global, people studying abroad and travelling for work, a closer look should be paid to culture shock and cultural differences. Culture shock plays a crucial role during international travels as it influences the outcome of an individual's stay in a new environment, including communication and the overall intercultural contact. In order to succeed on international scale, organizations depend on employees to lead culturally diverse working groups, solve complex problems, develop partnerships and negotiate deals when sent on international business trips.

Therefore, the Bachelor thesis deals with culture shock as a barrier to intercultural business communication with the aim to help minimize its symptoms. The theoretical part explains terms such as culture, intercultural communication and intercultural contact. The theoretical background to cultural dimensions and barriers to intercultural communication is provided, too. The main focus is placed on culture shock, including its symptoms, stages, determinants and three components called the ABCs of culture shock.

The practical part of the thesis introduces selected countries in terms of their economic and cultural aspects. Selected countries are compared, their cultural differences and similarities are explained using Hofstede's six-dimensional model. Primary research in the form of a questionnaire aims to find out cultural differences in selected cultural dimensions based on Meyer's eight-scale model. Furthermore, the questionnaire uncovers the most common symptoms of culture shock experienced by business people during their international business trips. The main goal of the thesis is to provide recommendations on culture shock elimination and answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there significant cultural differences between Germany, China and Slovakia concerning selected cultural dimensions?

RQ2: Is culture shock a barrier to intercultural business communication?

I. THEORY

1 CULTURE

Culture affects people's lives in all ways and aspects – from their behaviour, the way of thinking and problem-solving, to the overall construction and function of economic and government systems. (Hall 1976, 16-17) "Culture deals with the way people live." (Chaney and Martin 2007, 5) The term *culture* has many varying definitions, it represents "a series of situational models for behaviour and thought". (Hall 1976, 13) Culture can be understood as "a structure through which the communication is formulated and interpreted." (Chaney and Martin 2007, 5) According to Hall, culture and communication represent the same thing. (Gudykunst 2003, 8)

1.1 Culture as a Mental Software

All people are influenced and shaped by the environment they grow up and live in. From an early age, they learn appropriate ways of thinking, feeling and acting in certain situations. Hofstede encompasses them by using the term "mental programs" and refers to culture as "a mental software" which needs to be learned. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 5-6) In this way, people pass their culture down from one generation to another. (Jandt 2001, 6)

1.2 Culture as the Collective Programming of the Mind

Culture is based on elements such as traditions, customs, norms, values, shared sets of beliefs, rituals, language and thought patterns. (Jandt 2001, 6) The interconnected elements heavily influence people throughout their lives. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 6) However, various groups of people differ in their cultural elements, therefore, cultural barriers between such groups are formed. (Hall 1976, 16-17) As a result, Hofstede describes culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others." (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 6)

1.3 Culture as the Way of Solving Problems

Cultures, nations, groups and individuals have to deal with similar problems, yet they do not use the same solutions. People think and act differently, thus, find different solutions to globally universal problems. In order to understand culture, it is crucial to recognize and understand cultural differences in selected solutions to universal problems. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 4) Therefore, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner explain the concept of culture as "the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas." (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, 6)

1.4 Intercultural Communication

The meaning of communication is to share thoughts, ideas and information with others. (Jandt 2001, 27) Communication constitutes of ten components: source, encoding, message, channel, noise, receiver, decoding, receiver response, feedback and context. (Jandt 2001, 29) A source is a person who communicates ideas by transforming them into symbols. The sender encodes the intended message which is transmitted through a chosen channel. However, communication is full of noise which disrupts the encoded message. A receiver is a person who decodes the message. In order to understand the symbols, the receiver has to assign them meaning. The receiver forms a response called feedback which has meaning for the sender. (Jandt 2001, 30-32) Figure 1 describes the process of communication in a simplistic way based on Harold Lasswell's communication model.
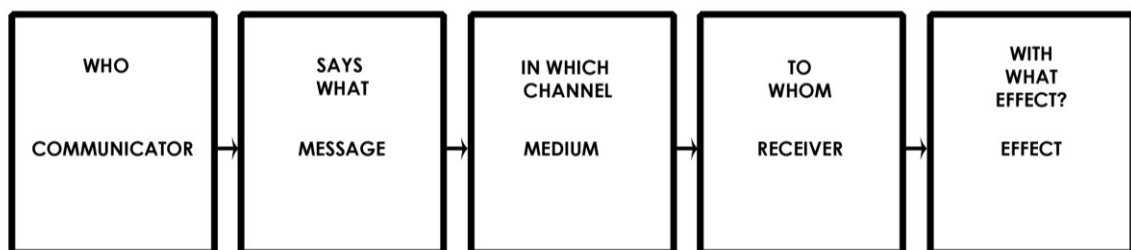
Figure 1 Lasswell's Model of Communication (Source: Communication Theory, n. d.)

All in all, communication takes place in an environment called context. (Jandt 2001, 32) By understanding the context, the purpose and the meaning of the message are understood as well. (Mead and Andrews 2009, 95) Intercultural communication involves interaction between culturally diverse people. (Gudykunst 2003, 163) Such communication is hindered by confusion due to dissimilar contexts of the source and the receiver. (Jandt 2001, 38)

1.5 Intercultural Contact

Intercultural contact is divided into within-society and between-society contact. Within-society intercultural contact takes place in a multi-cultural society between culturally diverse individuals. Between-society intercultural contact occurs when individuals travel to a foreign country for a set period of time to fulfil a certain purpose (such as work, study or complete an assignment). (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 5) Cultural travellers as temporary visitors personally interact with residents of the host country, thus, come into direct contact with an unfamiliar culture. (Bochner 2003, 3) Cultural transition encompasses a series of substantial, stressful and overwhelming life changes which lead to experiencing culture

shock. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 43) Currently, the number of cross-cultural transitions is increasing due to industrial globalization, increasing movement of workers, refugees and migrants, increased accessibility of educational exchanges, increased tourism and mass travel. (Ward, Bochner, Furnham 2001, 5)

2 CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

A value can be described as "a central and basic motivating belief that shapes our goals and motivations". (Jandt 2001, 227) Values are shared in cultures and deeply rooted within people living in them. Influenced by the values dominant in their culture, people establish certain behaviours and prefer certain solutions to universal problems. (Jandt 2001, 228) Cultures are distinguished from each other by finding different solutions to universal areas of problems called *dimensions*. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, 27)

2.1 The five Value Orientation Theory

In 1961, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck analysed in *Variations in Value Orientations* "a definite variability in the ways of life human beings build for themselves". (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961, 1) They proposed the idea of comparing cultures and distinguishing them from each other. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, 26) The five value orientations theory provided an insight into universal problems of all cultures and their different approaches to them – for the first time analytically and systematically. (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961, 2-3)

2.2 The Six-Dimensional Model

Hofstede studied the proposed idea of universal problems and the outcome of his research in 1980, which included over 100 000 employees from 40 different countries, was the discovery of four main problems called *dimensions of cultures*. Hofstede used them to compare cultures to each other on scales. (Jandt 2001, 199) The four-dimensional model included power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 31) Currently, Hofstede's six-dimensional model also includes long-term orientation and indulgence. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 45)

2.3 The Seven-Dimensional Model

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner recognise in *Riding the Waves of Culture* seven cultural dimensions divided into three separate categories. The first category includes dimensions: universalism versus particularism, individualism versus communitarianism, neutral versus emotional, specific versus diffuse and achievement versus ascription. The second category includes dimension called sequential versus synchronic time, and the third category includes dimension called internal direction versus external direction (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, 8-10) Their seven-dimensional model is based on a dynamic approach which

proposes the option for each culture to move around instead of being put on a static scale with two opposites. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, 27)

2.4 The Eight-Scale Model

Meyer analyses in *The Culture Map* misunderstandings that arise from cultural differences. The focus is placed on finding solutions to problems which occur during international business travels. Meyer explores eight areas of cultural differences which people conducting international business should be aware of. The eight-scale model places cultures on communicating, evaluating, persuading, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing and scheduling scale, each with two extreme opposites. (Meyer 2015, 15-22)

3   CULTURE SHOCK AS A BARRIER TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

According to LaRay M. Barna, there are six barriers to intercultural communication. (Jandt 2001, 177) Cultures are dissimilar in their context and communication which often leads to translation problems and confusion. (Gudykunst 2003, 53-54) Through language, symbols are shared, ideas are expressed and understood. Language is an integral part of every culture and shared symbols may lose their meaning during intercultural communication, thus become barriers. (Jandt 2001, 177) The inability to understand and interpret nonverbal cues is the second barrier to communication. (Jandt 2001, 51) The differences are in proxemics, chronemics, haptics, kinesics, oculesics, olfactics, vocalics and physical appearance. (Gudykunst 2003, 74)

High anxiety as the third barrier takes the focus off of the communication due to the inability to pay attention and express ideas. (Jandt 2001, 68) The fourth barrier stems from incorrectly assuming that another culture is either similar or different in certain ways to an individual's culture of origin. (Jandt 2001, 52-53) The fifth barrier is ethnocentrism – the belief that an individual's culture of origin (including language, values, norms, and beliefs) is superior to other cultures. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 9) Ethnocentrism heavily impacts an individual's perception of other people and their culture. (Jandt 2001, 53) Lastly, the sixth barrier includes stereotyping and prejudice against people of different cultural backgrounds. (Jandt 2001, 51)

3.1 Culture Shock

Approximately 30% to 60% of cultural travellers experience culture shock during cross-cultural transitions. (Jandt 2001, 340) The term *culture shock*, named by an anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in 1960, was used to explain people's reactions to unfamiliar environments, including their feelings during such stressful experience. (Bochner 2003, 4) Oberg described the feelings of anxiety, stress and depression accompanied by the loss of the familiar during cross-cultural travels. (Irwin 2007, 1) Culture shock, a series of feelings of disorientation, stress and anxiety, is a result of individuals feeling lost and behaving inappropriately upon their arrival to an unfamiliar environment. (Jandt 2001, 340) The term *shock* represents both the stress accompanied with the transition and an individual's deficit of appropriate skills to survive in a new culture. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 39)

Culture shock is a traumatic experience for cultural travellers as their stay in a host country becomes full of frustrations. The sources of frustration may be communication

difficulties, unfamiliar cuisine, different etiquette and customs. The covert sources of frustration are cultural norms and values. Cultural travellers have to deal with a great number of cultural differences. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 73) As a result, they experience physical and psychical side-effects which necessitate both physical and psychical adjustments. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 84) As culturally diverse individuals differ in their contexts and symbols, intercultural communication is full of difficulties and leads to breakdowns. (Irwin 2007, 3-4) Culture shock decreases the effectiveness of communication by acting as its barrier. (Jandt 2001, 340-42)

3.2 Symptoms of Culture Shock

The view of culture shock as a medical problem began to shift in the 1980s. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 36) However, culture shock is still recognised as an illness with a wide range of symptoms experienced by cultural travellers over a longer period of time. (Irwin 2007, 1-2) Cultural travellers experience psychological and physiological symptoms with differences in their duration, intensity and significance. (Jandt 2001, 342)

3.2.1   Psychological Symptoms of Culture Shock

The loss of familiar symbols, signs and the way of life is associated with feelings of loneliness, emotional isolation and the loss of identity. (Irwin 2007, 2) Feelings of homesickness, irritation and severe depression belong to psychological symptoms. Frustrations over minor things and increased aggression towards residents of the host country are often experienced. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 74) Some individuals feel insecure and nervous, doubting their abilities in a new culture. (Jandt 2001, 342) In search of safety or out of fear of contact with residents of the host country, cultural travellers may become highly dependent on other long-term residents of the same nationality. (Irwin 2007, 2) Some may develop feelings of strong hatred towards the host country, resulting in stereotyping and criticism. (Jandt 2001, 342)

3.2.2   Physiological Symptoms of Culture Shock

Physiological illnesses include impulsive eating and drinking or the use of alcohol and drugs. The most common symptoms are excessive concern over cleanliness (including food, water, dishes and bedding), excessive concern over health, minor pains and injuries as well as excessive concern over safety stemming from the fear of being robbed or injured. Culture shock may be the cause of sickness, insomnia and fatigue. (Jandt 2001, 342)

3.3 The Six Determinants of Culture Shock

Change, positive or negative, is a stressful experience. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 39) Cross-cultural transition is one of the most significant life-changing experiences filled with series of stressful situations. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 84) Moving out of one's familiar environment, being exposed to an unfamiliar cultural environment and having to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds is a difficult and frustrating process. Ward, Bochner, and Furnham propose six reasons why culture shock as part of the cultural transition causes such stress. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 9)

The Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis

According to the similarity-attraction hypothesis introduced by Donn Byrne, individuals choose to interact with people similar to them. They seek out people who share their culture with the same characteristics such as language, age, appearance, interests and hobbies, occupation and values. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 9) Therefore, individuals are less likely to favour people perceived as different. Cultures choose different solutions to universal problems and impose different rules to guide people's behaviour to minimize misunderstandings and the ambiguity of social interactions. People seek the security of similar people who share the same meaning and approve of their behaviour. Individuals in a new culture lose such security. They often feel lost and inappropriate among people with different values acting according to unfamiliar rules. (Bochner 2003, 5)

The Culture-Distance Hypothesis

The difficulties during one's transition are also attributed to the extent to which an individual's culture differs from the host culture. According to the culture-distance hypothesis, there are cultures sharing more similar features and cultures differing greatly in aspects such as educational, legal and value system. Therefore, the more cultural differences an individual has to face, the more difficulties may arise during the transition. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 9)

Social Categorisation

Both identity and the need to categorise people into in-groups and out-groups are closely connected to the similarity-attraction hypothesis. Members of in-groups are perceived and treated differently than members of out-groups. There is an innate tendency to prioritise

those with whom individuals are familiar with. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 9) This phenomenon is called in-group bias. (Bochner 2003, 5) Cultural travellers are inevitably perceived as members of out-groups by residents of the host country. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 9)

Stereotyping

Social categorisation into in-groups and out-groups may create a foundation for stereotyping individuals and groups into which they belong. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 9)

Primary Socialisation

Values and norms are acquired during early stages of life. They are covert and relatively stable throughout life. Stressful situations and conflicts may result from interactions between individuals who do not share the same core values. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 9)

Cultural Syndromes

Values, norms, behaviours and attitudes (called *cultural syndromes*) are similar in some countries, yet may be viewed oppositely in other countries. According to Harry C. Triandis, there are three main cultural syndromes which influence the cross-cultural transition. The most significant cultural differences are rooted in the perception of time (*cultural complexity*), the level of certainty (*tight versus loose countries*) and the perception of *individualism versus collectivism*. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 10)

3.4 The Four Stages of Culture Shock

According to Oberg, cultural travellers experience four stages of culture shock. The initial stage, called *the honeymoon phase*, is filled with enthusiasm and fascination with the new. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 81) Residents of the host culture act politely and amiably towards newcomers. (Irwin 2007, 2) Travellers are swept up by the initial euphoria and tend to overlook differences and difficulties during the first few months of their stay. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 76)

The second stage, which may last up to four months, is characterised by the occurrence of various symptoms of culture shock. (Jandt 2001, 340) Travellers become aware of the differences between the cultures. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 81) Residents may seem unpleasant and environment alien. (Irwin 2007, 2) Travellers experience stressful situations and communication difficulties. The feelings of excitement are replaced by

overwhelming helplessness, confusion and homesickness. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 77) During this stage, coping mechanisms to survive in a new culture are developed. Negative mechanisms often include stereotyping and generalisation as a result of rejecting the new culture. According to the course of this stage, travellers may decide to leave or stay. (Irwin 2007, 2-3)

Travellers recover from symptoms during the third stage by learning necessary culture-specific skills and behaviours. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 81) As the culture learning process progresses, travellers feel more comfortable in a new culture, however, their adjustment is gradual and slow. (Jandt 2001, 340)

The fourth stage is marked by successful adjustment to a new culture. (Jandt 2001, 340) Travellers play an active role in a new culture, have acquired culture-specific skills and behavioural patterns, speak a new language and successfully create new relationships with residents of the host culture. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 77)

3.4.1   The Re-Entry Shock

Upon the return to the culture of origin, culture shock may reappear with the fifth stage called *re-entry shock*. During the re-entry stage, travellers experience once again all four stages of culture shock, including both physical and psychical symptoms. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 76) After a successful adaptation to a new culture, symptoms during re-entry shock may have a stronger impact on travellers than symptoms experienced abroad during the second stage of culture shock. (Jandt 2001, 341)

3.4.2   The U-Curve Model of Culture Shock

Sverre Lysgaard visualised course of culture shock during the time spent abroad on a U-curve model. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 81) The initial stage begins at the top left, the crisis and gradual adjustment to a new culture are at the base of the U-curve. The re-entry shock is located at the top right side of the U-curve. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 76) According to John T. Gullahorn and Jeanne E. Gullahorn, the U-curve of culture shock repeats itself upon the arrival to the culture of origin (the W-curve model is formed), as shown in Figure 2. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 81)
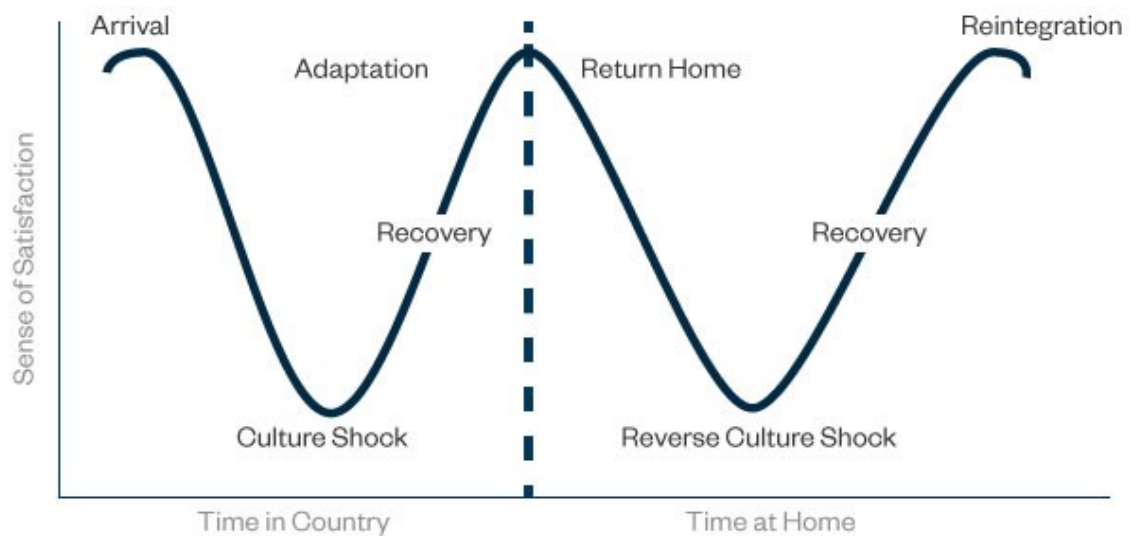
Figure 2 The W-Cur1ve of Culture Shock (Source: InterExchange 2019)

On the other hand, the stress and coping theories and the research conducted by Ward and colleagues express the inaccuracy of the division into four stages. According to them, the maximum stress is experienced during the first stage of cultural transition instead of the second stage. Therefore, adaptation difficulties and symptoms of culture shock may occur even earlier, may be present during the first half-year of the stay and disappear gradually. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 81-82)

3.5 Sojourners: International Business People

There are different types of cultural travellers such as tourists, immigrants, sojourners and expatriates. (Jandt 2001, 339) Sojourners are cultural travellers who temporarily stay in a foreign country and return home after the purpose of their stay is fulfilled. Expatriate business people are a type of sojourners who travel due to business and work reasons. They experience medium length intercultural contact. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 123-124) Their main goal is to fulfil work assignments and be able to interact with business partners, co-workers, employees and customers. The transition has a great impact on their way of life as well as their career. Business people on managerial positions are responsible for international trade, business relationships, business deals and success of the organization they represent. Therefore, organizations carefully choose individuals and tend to provide preparation via training and assessment. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 168)

Majority of difficulties during transition arise due to cultural variations in business and managerial practices. Leadership and negotiation styles, employee relationships,

communication across hierarchical levels, task versus relationship orientation, feedback, unwritten versus written rules, rewarding, promotion and selection of employees are not universal. Due to globalisation, workgroups in multinational organizations are difficult to manage as they become more culturally diverse. Such groups are faced with interpersonal friction and stress due to their cultural differences. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 170-171)

Culture shock negatively impacts workflow, the quality of output and the ability to finish assignments. (Jandt 2001, 342) Premature return of business people occurs mainly due to their lack of training, their inability to fulfil work requirements and adapt to a new culture. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 75) Furthermore, re-entry to home culture is more difficult as business people have to readapt to their home organization, re-establish work relationships and once more adjust their business practices. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 169)

4 THE ABCS OF CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is an active process and comprises of three components called *the ABCs of culture shock* or the affective, behavioural and cognitive components. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 39) The behavioural component is based on culture learning approach, the affective component is based on stress and coping approach, and the cognitive component includes social identification theories. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 48)

4.1 Behaviours: Culture Learning Approach

In order to overcome culture shock, individuals have to adapt to a new culture by changing their behaviour and learning new skills. (Jandt 2001, 364) The culture learning theoretical approach assumes that difficulties during cultural transition arise due to the lack of appropriate skills and behaviours that would guide travellers' daily interactions in a new cultural environment. All individuals entering a new culture undergo cultural learning to some degree – they acquire native cultural practices. (Gudykunst 2003, 245)

4.1.1 Social Interaction During Intercultural Contact

The culture learning approach is based on acquiring culturally-specific skills as vital components of intercultural communication and social interactions. Upon arrival to a new culture, travellers lack appropriate social skills, social rules and conventions as well as the knowledge of culturally-specific verbal and non-verbal elements of communication. The inability to socially interact with others causes communication breakdowns, leads to stereotyping and conflicts. Travellers are placed in the position of socially incompetent individuals unaware of social conventions and rules in a new culture. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 51-52)

4.1.2 Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence requires the understanding of fundamental culture-specific components of social interaction. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 65) It necessitates the proper use of messages during communication and the proper behaviour in different situations as well as the understanding of social rules guiding the behaviour. (Gudykunst 2003, 193) Intercultural communication competence is based on three components: *motivation* as the positive or negative drive to communicate (influenced by factors such as culture distance, anxiety, ethnocentrism, prejudice, confidence and previous experience), *knowledge* as the understanding of intercultural competence (based on

information, rules and context of interaction) and *skills* as the actual behaviour during intercultural interaction. (Gudykunst 2003, 195-196)

4.1.3   Cultural Dimensions

Cultural travellers are often unaware of cultural dimensions affecting the way people think, act and deal with problems. To the most fundamental cultural dimensions belong individualism versus collectivism, power distance, high-context versus low-context communication, time perception, negotiation style and giving feedback. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 53) Essentially, travellers need to understand the meaning of shared symbols and learn the social rules of a new culture. (Irwin 2007, 4) This leads to minimizing communicational misunderstandings and difficulties, therefore, eliminating barriers to intercultural communication. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 69)

4.2 Affects: Stress and Coping Approach

The stress and coping theoretical approach deals with the psychological well-being of travellers during their cross-cultural transition. The theory recognizes individual and situational factors which disrupt social interactions and cultural adjustment in order to find ways to cope and successfully adjust to a new culture. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 48) Travellers acquire positive or negative coping skills which help them deal with acculturation stress. While positive coping skills may include learning new skills, creating relationships or developing a new hobby, some cultural travellers may deal with stress by drinking, taking drugs or overeating. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 84)

4.2.1   Three Components of Acculturation

The model of acculturation process developed by John Berry is based on three components. The first component includes *stressful changes* which impact travellers during cross-cultural transition. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 72-73) The second component is the *cognitive appraisal of the situation* or how each traveller evaluates the situation (as a threat or a difficulty). The third component is based on the chosen *coping strategies* to deal with stressful experiences during the transition. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 76-77)

4.2.2   Variables of Acculturation

The acculturation process with three components is influenced by variables such as personality, culture, social support and strategies of acculturation in a new culture. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 72-73) Firstly, *personality* may predict travellers' acculturation

process. While neuroticism is connected to feelings of anxiety and depression which leads to experiencing difficulties during the cultural transition, extraversion is connected to psychological and emotional adjustment. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 86) Secondly, *cultural background* and *culture distance* influence the acculturation process. The more cultural differences there are, the more stressful changes travellers have to deal with. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 96) Thirdly, *social support* or its absence predicts the acculturation process. Secure relationships with co-nationals as well as social support of residents of the host culture provide essential information during the transition and help minimize stress. On the other hand, loneliness decreases travellers' ability to adapt to a new environment. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 87-89) Lastly, all travellers develop different *coping strategies* influencing their acculturation process. Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub developed the COPE inventory which differentiates between four main coping strategies: approach, avoidance, acceptance and support. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 78)

4.3 Cognitions: Social Identity Theories

Social identification theories focus on travellers' identity and deal with factors influencing cultural identity changes, social interactions, group membership, social categorisation and division into in-groups and out-groups. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 48) Social identification is explored by social identity theories which deal with group membership and categorisation into in-groups and out-groups as well as by acculturation models and measurements which consider identification with home and host culture. (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 100)

4.3.1   Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory by Henri Tajfel deals with social categorisation as a natural tendency to divide people into in-groups and out-groups, and inter-group comparisons having both negative and positive effect on an individual's self-esteem. Tajfel argues that favouring members of in-groups is a natural outcome of social identification. Cultural travellers are perceived as unfamiliar members of out-groups, therefore, likely to be avoided or resented by residents of the host culture. Moreover, residents of the host culture may feel threatened by them. This tendency may result in stereotyping, discrimination and prejudices towards travellers which impedes their acculturation process as well as towards residents of the host culture. (Ward, Bochner, Furnham 2001, 104-105)

4.3.2 Acculturation

Acculturation is "the process of adjusting and adapting to a new and different culture" (Chaney and Martin 2007, 8) by learning new culture-specific skills, appropriate behavioural patterns, cultural values and norms. (Jandt 2001, 356) Acculturation is the result of direct intercultural contact between individuals of different cultural backgrounds. (Ward, Bochner, Furnham 2001, 43) The contact between different cultures influences individual and group cultural identity and leads to various individual and group outcomes. (Ward, Bochner, Furnham 2001, 27)

There are four attitudes to acculturation: separation, assimilation, integration and marginalisation. (Ward, Bochner, Furnham 2001, 103) *Separation* refers to being a part of the culture of origin and rejecting the host culture. (Jandt 2001, 356) *Assimilation*, as the highest degree of acculturation, refers to the acceptance of the host culture and becoming a part of it. (Gudykunst 2003, 245) *Integration*, or biculturalism, refers to being part of both cultures by maintaining core values of the culture of origin and adapting practices of the host culture (Jandt 2001, 356) Lastly, *marginalisation* is a rejection of both the culture of origin and the host culture. (Ward, Bochner, Furnham 2001, 31)

II. ANALYSIS

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED CULTURES

For the purposes of the Bachelor thesis, three countries (Germany, China and Slovakia) are selected and compared to each other. Firstly, general information about each country is provided, including demographic, economic and historical background. Secondly, cultural characteristics of each country are described in four sections: division of private and public life, communication style, time perception and leadership style, decision-making and hierarchy. Lastly, selected countries are compared to each other using The Country Comparison Tool based on Hofstede's six-dimensional model. The main purpose is to recognize cultural differences between selected countries which are further analysed within the research. The practical part uses secondary data, mainly *Software of the Mind* by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *The Culture Map* by Meyer and *Intercultural Business Communication* by Chaney and Martin. Online sources such as Hofstede Insights and Cultural Atlas, economic and statistical web sites such as TRADING ECONOMICS, OECD, INSEAD and FOCUSECONOMICS are used.

5.1 General Information about Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany, situated in the Western part of Europe, consists of sixteen states and covers an area of 357 thousand square kilometres. As one of the founding members of the European Union, Germany represents its most populous country with more than 82 million inhabitants. (Leao 2011, 13) Germany, as one of the world's largest exporters and importers following China and the United States, is the largest economy in Europe and one of the leading economies worldwide. Particularly, Germany's nominal GDP per capita has grown to $49.692 in 2019 (StatisticsTimes.com 2019), the average inflation (CPI) was measured at 1.53% in 2019. (inflation.eu 2019) In April 2019, Germany measured the lowest unemployment rate of 3.2% since 1980. (TRADING ECONOMICS 2019) As one of the world's largest exporters of steel, aluminium, cars and other manufactured products (Chaney and Martin 2007, 24), Germany took the first place with the total of 20% of worldwide car exports in 2018. (Workman 2019)

After the fall of Berlin Wall, borders between East and West Germany opened in 1989, which led to speeding up and strengthening of the economy. The focus was placed on changing the world's perceptions of Germany as a country of Nazis to a modern industrial country with a powerful economy detached from its past. Currently, the economic system provides a high standard of living. (Leao 2011, 13-15) Great importance is placed on education. According to OECD indicators, the level of education in Germany belongs to one

of the highest. The data show that up to 85% of 25-64-years old people have completed their upper secondary studies. (OECD 2014) Consequently, the majority of Germans fall into the upper-middle class. (Leao 2011, 31)

5.2 Cultural Characteristics of Germany

Due to the country's division into sixteen constituent states, Germans consider themselves as members of a specific state, prioritizing their regional background before recognizing their nationality as such. (Leao 2011, 17) German culture is rather hierarchical and individualistic. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 45) Consequently, the most fundamental values represent following the order and respecting rules. Following firmly set rules and maintaining firm discipline is an essential part of facilitating order in life. Germans aim to exercise control over life to avoid uncertainty, accidents and risks. Therefore, Germans are typically viewed by foreigners as methodical, thorough, serious, highly organized and reliable people. (Leao 2011, 18)

5.2.1 Division of Private and Public Life

Due to the tendency to keep control in life, the division of private and public life is followed. During the working time, a high level of formality, objectivity and professionalism is required. Therefore, building friendships and spending time with family belong to private life which is usually not discussed in the workplace. (Leao 2011, 17) Germans tend to keep a distance from their co-workers and regard mixing personal and professional relationships as disrupting. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 225) Moreover, Germans acknowledge the status of a person through appropriate behaviour as well as addressing people using their full names with titles. The status of a person is based on both professional accomplishments and the level of education. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 164) It is essential to show well-deserved respect at all times by acknowledging people's accomplishments, their position at work and years spent on acquiring academic education by using proper titles at work as well as upon meeting them outside the workplace. (Leao 2011, 29-30)

5.2.2 Communication Style

Germans value honesty and direct approach in communication, the overall communication style is low-context with clear and precisely worded messages. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 105) The intended meaning of a message is expressed explicitly using mainly words in their literal sense. (Cultural Atlas 2019) The German language uses sentence structures which move the verb towards the end of a sentence (in particular: subordinate clause, relative and

infinitive constructions and sentences with a compound verb) (GermanVeryEasy.com, n. d.), therefore, the meaning of a sentence is often conveyed in the end as well. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 105)

Despite lacking physical contact, communication requires maintaining direct eye-contact as a sign of honesty and confidence. (Cultural Atlas 2019) Germans are usually reserved concerning non-verbal communication and body expressiveness which contributes to their stoic appearance. However, they tend to openly express verbal disagreements. Open confrontation plays a crucial part in finding the objective truth in life as it facilitates progress and improvements towards future goals. (Meyer 2015, 205-207) Thus, direct criticism and negative feedback are deemed necessary in the process of employee's improvement. (Meyer 2015, 69)

5.2.3 Time Perception

Germany represents a monochronic culture in which people focus on performing one task at a time. Germans plan their actions thoroughly to maintain order in life. The belief that *time is money* implies that time is a tangible and valuable commodity not to be wasted. (Meyer 2015, 220) Following a set of rules and guidelines requires following tight schedules, therefore, punctuality is a highly regarded virtue. Germans are highly reliable as they try to avoid delays, calling in advance in case any lateness is expected belongs to standard procedures when conducting business. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 133) Overall, Germany is a long-term oriented culture with a focus on achieving long-term goals towards the future. (Hofstede Insights 2019)

5.2.4 Hierarchy, Leadership and Decision-Making

Germany is perceived as a hierarchical country due to hierarchically structured organizations in which showing respect to authority, following a formal division of superordinate and subordinates and the use of formal titles is required. (Meyer 2015, 144) However, individual leaders in organizations have less power as egalitarian leadership style is preferred. (Meyer 2015, 125) Therefore, it is possible to openly disagree with a leader and communicate with employees across hierarchical levels. (Meyer 2015, 131) Moreover, Germans value group orientation in decision-making processes. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 225) Typically, decisions are made by reaching a consensus between an organization's senior managers or supervisory board. (Meyer 2015, 148) Lengthy decision-making processes and time spent on reaching a group agreement are typically followed by a short implementation phase. (Meyer 2015, 146-147) After deciding on specific plans and goals, alterations during the

implementation phase are rare. As a result, Germans are perceived as highly detail-oriented and systematic workers, ensuring high standards and outstanding quality of products. (Leao 2011, 34-35)

5.3 General Information about China

The People's Republic of China, a socialist state under the communist regime, is located in East Asia and covers an area of 9.388 thousand square kilometres. It is the most populous country in the world with more than 1.418 billion inhabitants. (Worldometers, n. d.) China is the world's largest trading economy with the rapid economic growth after undergoing economic changes in 1978. Moreover, China is a highly agricultural country with half of the population employed in the primary sector. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 23) However, the secondary sector is on the rise due to the manufacturing of electronics and machinery. (FOCUSECONOMICS 2019) The nominal GDP per capita was measured $10.099 in 2019 (StatisticsTimes.com. 2019), a record low unemployment rate of 3.67% was measured in January 2019 (TRADING ECONOMICS 2019), and the average inflation (CPI) of 2.02% was measured in 2019. (inflation.eu. 2019)

China's economic reform in 1978 led to the opening of economy and China's market to international business trades which impacted the whole world. With the rapid growth of the economy, China transformed quickly into a prosperous country, however, the gap between the poor and the rich started to increase. (Zhou and Bang 2019) Implementation of the one-child policy by the Chinese Government in 1980 aimed to reduce the rapid growth of population. Eventually, it led to the growth of the male population as well as the ageing of the population. (Pletcher 2019) China's policy lasted up to 2016 when the total number of men exceeded the total number of women by 33.59 million. (Augustyn et al. 2019)

5.4 Cultural Characteristics of China

China's history and culture have been heavily shaped by Confucianism, a religion or a philosophy which aims to facilitate order in life. It is the ideology that shapes the way of life in China by determining social norms, values, social code and ethics. Confucianism is present in China's education, government and social system. The ideology determines the hierarchical order in society and places importance on respecting the authority. (Weiming 2019) As a result, families are placed above individuals in society and elderly people are accorded the utmost respect. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 39) Following Confucian principles, order and harmony are maintained by stating an individual's position in society and

following the structure of relationships between people higher or lower in social rank. Alongside paying respect to family members, elders and following their traditions, responsibility, honesty and politeness belong to the most prominent values in China. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 63-65)

5.4.1 Division of Public and Private Life

Public and private life are tightly interconnected in collectivist China. The importance of family and the need to build trust by forming long-term relationships transfer from the private to the public sphere. A form of patronage is secured by *guanxi* which translates as forming personal relationships that serve as an anchor and provide a considerable advantage when conducting business. In order to establish *guanxi relationships*, a great amount of trust, loyalty and obligation towards the people involved is required. (Mead and Andrews 2009, 172-173) Consequently, trust-building and credibility are based on building personal relationships outside the workplace as well as taking into account individuals' accomplishments and reliability at work. (Meyer 2015, 168-169)

5.4.2 Communication Style

As one of the most high-context cultures in the world, Chinese people form groups which develop their shared context. (Meyer 2015, 48) Communication style is subtle and messages are expressed indirectly due to preserving relationships and group harmony. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 105) Using vague terms conveying multiple meanings draws the attention towards contextual clues, tone of voice, body language and other non-verbal clues. (Cultural Atlas 2019) The Chinese refrain from openly showing their emotions, therefore, their overall expressiveness is subtle. (Meyer 2015, 204) Communication lacks direct eye-contact and physical contact, however, the Chinese use silence to show respect, read the implied messages and think through the next steps in a conversation. (Cultural Atlas 2019) Furthermore, the Chinese tend to avoid direct disagreements, open criticism and confrontations. (Chanlat, Davel, and Dupuis 2013, 154) The importance is placed on the concept called *mianzi* which is concerned with preserving a person's reputation, social status and saving face. The need to avoid public shame comes before openly stating a person's opinions that might disturb group harmony. (Meyer 2015, 198-199)

5.4.3 Time Perception

China is a polychronic culture in which people tend to multitask. (Meyer 2015, 227-28) Chinese people are extremely flexible and efficient (Meyer 2015, 236-37), therefore, the

ability to work simultaneously on more tasks with interruptions and changes to plans are highly valued qualities. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 119) Due to constantly changing plans and deadlines, scheduling is rather approximate. Time is relative and dynamic as people do not fear the unpredictability of the future. (Meyer 2015, 224) However, the Chinese still value punctuality and expect a person's apology in case of any lateness. (Meyer 2015, 236-37) All in all, China belongs to cultures with a long-term orientation paying respect to its vast history and traditions. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 119)

5.4.4   Hierarchy, Leadership and Decision-Making

In a collectivist, highly hierarchical and patriarchal China, everyone occupies a certain position in hierarchical order and acts according to the prescribed roles. (Meyer 2015, 130-131) Respect to the authority is shown by using full names with titles and greeting by bowing. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 165) Etiquette plays an important role in China, therefore, sitting arrangements, entering the room and shaking hands follow individuals' social rank. (Meyer 2015, 133) In a family, the father occupies the highest role and cannot be challenged. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 164-165) Likewise, the leader of an organization is the father and protector of subordinates who are expected to show loyalty and obediently follow their leader. (Meyer 2015, 130) While an organization's decisions and plans are made quickly by a leader, they are subject to further alterations, revisions and lengthy discussions during the implementation phase. (Meyer 2015, 149)

5.5 General Information about Slovakia

The Slovak Republic, situated in Central Europe, is a small nation with a population of 5.4 million people and an area covering 49 thousand square kilometres. Slovakia has been affected by being a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for almost a thousand years, a part of Czechoslovakia after 1918 as well as a part of the Eastern bloc of Europe until its fall in 1989. After the split from Czech Republic, Slovakia claimed independence as a democratic nation in 1993. As a rural nation, Slovakia lacked the progress in the economy with the decline of production based in heavy industry. (Auty et al. 2019) Currently, the industrial sector dominates the Slovak economy with the majority of exports in the automobile and electronics industry. (COUNTRIES of the WORLD 2019) The manufacturing industry, specifically machinery, chemical and steel industry, employs the majority of the labour force. (Auty et al. 2019)

Entering the European Union in 2004 boosted the growth of the economy – both inflation rate and country's deficit decreased. A noticeable increase in GDP is attributed to numerous foreign investments and privately-owned foreign companies based in Slovakia. (Auty et al. 2019) The nominal GDP per capita measured $20.598 in 2019 (StatisticsTimes.com. 2019), the current unemployment rate decreased to 4.9% in April 2019 (TRADING ECONOMICS 2019), and the inflation (CPI) was measured at 2.37% in 2019. (inflation.eu 2019)

5.6 Cultural Characteristics of Slovakia

Due to previous socialist regime and the Roman Catholic religion being followed by more than 68% of inhabitants (Auty et al. 2019), Slovaks have a strong sense of group solidarity and commitment to the community. Despite current tendency to lean towards individualism (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 96), Slovakia is viewed as a hierarchical and paternalistic society in which a family, with a strong father figure who poses as the main bread-winner of the family, represents its fundamental unit. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 140-144) Showing respect to elders belongs to one of the core values. Slovaks also tend to differentiate between gender roles, following traditional divisions and stereotypes of men and women. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 151)

5.6.1 Division of Private and Public Life

It is vital to interconnect private and public life due to the importance of connections inside and between families as well as strong social ties during an individual's integration into society. Building personal relationships is an inevitable part of achieving success at the workplace. Trust-building is based on both individual's skills, competence, and reliability at work as well as on building long-term personal relationships inside and outside the workplace. Therefore, a considerable amount of time and effort is put into getting to know co-workers and fitting into the collective. (OECD, n. d.)

5.6.2 Communication Style

Communication is low-context, the ideas are expressed in an explicit manner and misunderstandings are quickly cleared up. Slovaks value honesty and openness, therefore, the direct approach in communication is preferred. Maintaining direct eye-contact is understood as a sign of confidence, trustworthiness, and seriousness (Communicaid 2019) while avoiding eye-contact indicates shyness or telling lies. Physical contact during communication in a formal setting is avoided except a firm handshake upon meeting and

parting as a sign of politeness. (Passport to Trade 2.0 2019) Slovaks are reserved in their expressiveness and non-verbal communication which contributes to their humble, shy or even self-conscious appearance. (Vedra 2019) Moreover, unwanted silence is often filled up with small talk as a way of getting to know the person. All in all, open confrontations and disagreements are avoided as they are perceived as offensive. Therefore, criticism, providing feedback and resolving conflicts are dealt with in a private setting. (Communicaid 2019)

5.6.3 Time Perception

Slovakia is a monochronic culture which follows linear time-table. Scheduling is tight with thorough planning and fixed deadlines. (Passport to Trade 2.0 2019) Time is a valuable commodity and Slovaks are conscious about time, they often refer to the idioms *time is running out* or *wasted time*. (Meyer 2015, 224) Punctuality is perceived as an important virtue when conducting business. (Passport to Trade 2.0 2019) Slovakia leans towards long-term orientation in building social networks and sustainable connections as well as goal-setting and planning as a part of organizations' long-term activities. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 225)

5.6.4 Leadership and Decision-Making

Slovakia is a hierarchical and paternalistic country with the highest score in power distance alongside Malaysia. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 58) Due to organizations' hierarchical structure, formal division of superordinate and subordinates is maintained. Showing respect to the authority, using full names with titles, following the etiquette and following an organizational hierarchical chain when communicating is crucial. (Communicaid 2019) Decision-making processes are usually made by an individual at the top of hierarchy such as a senior manager. (Passport to Trade 2.0 2019) Subordinates do not show their initiation or openly challenge their leader. Therefore, top-down decision-making processes are made quickly by a leader, however, plans are further revised during a lengthy implementation phase. (Communicaid 2019)

5.7 Comparison Based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

The Country Comparison Tool compares countries according to Hofstede's six-dimensional model. The tool comprises a database of 104 countries and compares cultural differences of four countries on a figure at once. The figure consists of six scales, each representing one cultural dimension (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence). Depending on countries' scores, ranging from 0 to 100

points on each scale, the Country Comparison Tool interprets the results to each dimension and country. The following figure displays scores of Germany, China and Slovakia, in the Comparison Tool. (Hofstede Insights 2019)
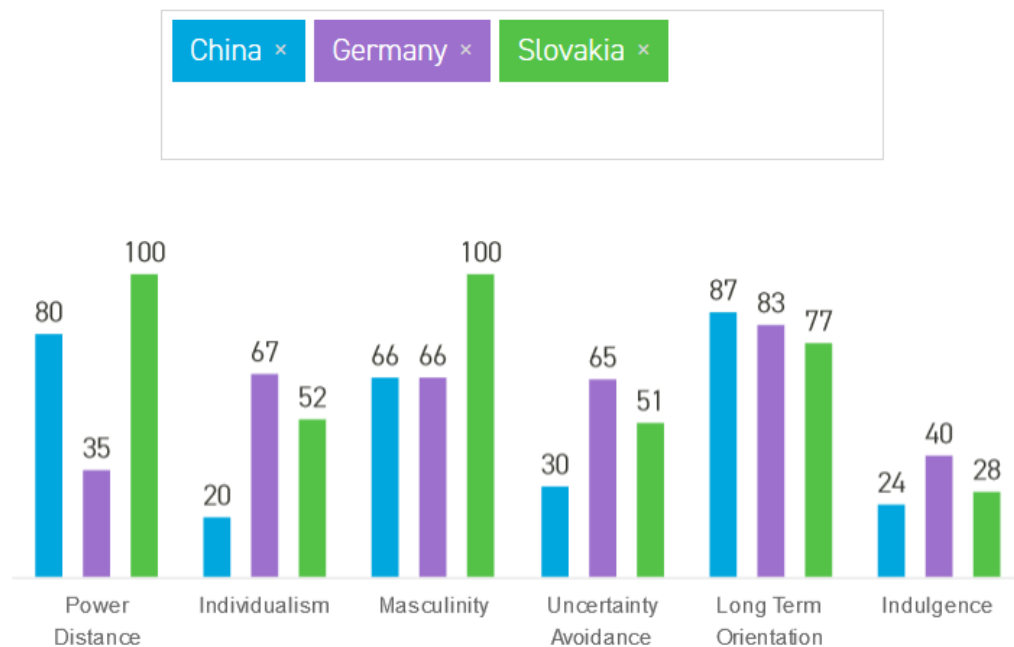

Figure 3 The Country Comparison Tool (Source: Hofstede Insights 2019)

5.8 Power Distance as a Cultural Dimension

The power distance index deals with the level of expected and accepted inequality in countries, specifically unequal distribution of power, status and wealth among members of a country. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 54-55) According to the figure above, Germany has a low power distance index with 35 points which suggest lower inequality between its members. Organizations with a flatter structure and autocratic style of leadership are preferred. A leader can be challenged by subordinates and decision-making processes are shared by a group of people. (Hofstede Insights 2019) On the other hand, China has a large power distance index with 80 points and Slovakia scores the highest of all countries with 100 points. (Hofstede Insights 2019) Therefore, less powerful members in China and Slovakia accept larger inequalities and become dependent on more powerful members of society. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 56) Organizational structure is hierarchical with a highly respected paternalistic leader who decides solely for the whole organization. (Hofstede Insights 2019)

5.9 Individualism as a Cultural Dimension

The individualism index divides countries between individualistic, placing the importance on an individual's success, and collectivist where groups' needs are taken into account. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 92) In-groups have a stronger influence over members of collectivist cultures. (Gudykunst 2003, 9) Germany scores high on the individualism index with 67 points; therefore, the importance is placed on individuals coming from smaller family units. (Hofstede Insights 2019) People strive for individual success and the fulfilment of their own needs as they compete with others to accomplish set goals at challenging work positions. Therefore, freedom, honesty and direct communication are valued. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 92) On the other hand, China scores the lowest with 20 points suggesting that individuals are members of tight in-groups in which they form strong and long-lasting relationships. (Hofstede Insights 2019) As a result, harmony, loyalty and support are essential values. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 92) Lastly, Slovakia falls in between individualist and collectivist countries with 52 points. (Hofstede Insights 2019) Though people strive to achieve individual success, it is equally important to build tight relationships as family and friends help individuals find their place in life. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 96)

5.10 Masculinity as a Cultural Dimension

The masculinity index deals with the role of men and women in society and the values associated with them. Masculinity is connected to status, thus competitive, tough and assertive behaviour is promoted. While masculine cultures distinguish clearly between male and female roles, feminine cultures focus on equality, behaving modestly, caring and protecting relationships as well as the environment. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 137-138) Both Germany and China score high on the masculinity index with 66 points. In Germany, status is openly displayed through owning expensive houses, cars and high-end products. In China, people work long hours and commute to bigger cities in search of a better-paid job to secure a better life for their families. Both countries place importance on a good education from an early age. (Hofstede Insights 2019) Slovakia as a highly success driven country with highly materialistic culture scores 100 points. In order to achieve goals and acquire higher status, people work hard and display their wealth through expensive products. All three countries are masculine and follow predetermined gender roles of men and women in society. (Hofstede Insights 2019)

5.11 Uncertainty Avoidance as a Cultural Dimension

The uncertainty avoidance index shows the expected and accepted level of uncertainty and ambiguity in life. Strong uncertainty avoidance cultures depend on fixed rules to avoid the fear of unpredictable while cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance are flexible as people like to take risks. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 189-191) According to the figure, Germany scores high on the uncertainty avoidance index with 65 points. There is a strong need to set rules and follow them, otherwise people feel nervous and fear the unknown. (Hofstede Insights 2019) Meticulously planned procedures and systematically organized plans are put into action in both professional and personal setting. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 190) In order to minimize risks, ensure safety and facilitate order in life, Germans pay close attention to detail and pride themselves on their professional expertise. On the other hand, China scores the lowest with 30 points. The Chinese do not fear the unknown and accept ambiguity in life, therefore, flexibility and the ability to adapt to changes is embraced. Slovakia scores in the middle with 51 points displaying a moderate level of uncertainty avoidance in life. (Hofstede Insights 2019)

5.12 Long-term Orientation as a Cultural Dimension

The long-term orientation index relates to the orientation towards past, present or future and has an impact on the economic growth of a country. It determines the most prominent values in culture and impacts decision-making and hiring processes, investing, goal setting and management styles in organizations. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 239) Long-term oriented cultures are more pragmatic with values such as persistence, orientation towards the future and achieving long-term goals. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 242) Short-term oriented cultures are concerned with the feeling of shame, preserving face, tradition, respecting social norms and traditions. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 242-44) All three countries score high on the long-term orientation index – Germany scores 83 points, China 87 points and Slovakia 77 points. (Hofstede Insights 2019) In all three countries, the past strongly influences present and future outcomes as people preserve their traditions. It is important to show status and respect the authority. People build long-term relationships based on mutual trust and loyalty. They value persistence, thriftiness as well as a pragmatic approach to life. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 236-37)

5.13 Indulgence as a Cultural Dimension

The indulgence index measures indulgence and restraint in life and how much cultures' norms restrict people's enjoyment. It measures the amount to which people feel content, happy, free and to what extent people exercise control over their life which influences people's overall positivity or negativity. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 281) Germany scores slightly below the middle with 40 points and still belongs to restrained cultures which form strict rules to control people's freedom in life. China scores the lowest with 24 points and Slovakia scores 28 points. (Hofstede Insights 2019) In both countries, social norms and regulations restrict people's indulgence in life. People are more pessimistic and believe they have no control over their life. The leisure time is less important as people repress their desires and refrain from enjoying themselves. (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010, 280-81)

6 METHODOLOGY

The practical part of the thesis aims to identify cultural differences between selected countries. Primary research in the form of a structured questionnaire is used to discover differences within selected dimensions and determine symptoms of culture shock. Based on the research results, the Bachelor's thesis provides recommendations on culture shock elimination to improve intercultural business communication between employees of German, Chinese and Slovak organizations.

6.1 The Main Goal

The main goal of the thesis is, based on the research results, to provide recommendations on culture shock elimination.

6.2 Research Questions

Primary research aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there significant cultural differences between Germany, China and Slovakia concerning selected cultural dimensions?

RQ2: Is culture shock a barrier to intercultural communication?

6.3 Research Methods

The research aims to find out whether employees of multinational organizations experience culture shock. Cultural dimensions are selected as the most common areas of misunderstandings. According to research results, cultural differences and the most common symptoms of culture shock are revealed. The practical part is based on primary research which analyses current information and first-hand data from a selected sample of respondents. Primary research analyses qualitative data, therefore, uncovers respondents' behavioural patterns, personal experiences, perception and thinking processes concerning the specific problem at hand. (Malhotra and Birks 2003, 133-135) Questionnaire survey is used as a method of qualitative research and the mail survey is the chosen technique. Email communication is established beforehand to select a specific sample and explain the research purpose. (Malhotra and Birks 2003, 230)

The structured questionnaire uses fixed-response alternative questions to guide respondents' answers. The advantage is that respondents' values, beliefs and attitudes perceived subconsciously are uncovered by a predetermined set of responses. The information needed is incorporated in the options, therefore, respondents can choose the

most fitting one. The disadvantage is that respondents may find the set of answers constrictive. Their true beliefs and feelings may not be captured accurately by close-ended questions. Another default is that questions may not be worded properly for respondents to understand their meaning. (Malhotra and Birks 2003, 224-25) Therefore, e-mail communication serves as a platform for dealing with such misunderstandings. (Malhotra and Birks 2003, 230)

7   PRIMARY RESEARCH

The primary research is based on the structured questionnaire filled in by German, Chinese and Slovak respondents travelling on business trips to selected countries. The research encompasses eight cultural dimensions in which selected cultures differ and deals with specific symptoms of culture shock. The main goal of primary research is to provide recommendations on culture shock elimination.

7.1 Research Design

The main body of the questionnaire is based on Meyer's eight-scale model described in *The Culture Map*. (Meyer 2015, 6) As a specialist in the fields of cross-cultural management, intercultural negotiations and multi-cultural leadership, Meyer uses the eight-scale model to train global executives worldwide. (INSEAD 2019) The model deals with the most common areas of misunderstandings between people who conduct business across cultures. (Meyer 2015, 6) Cultural dimensions are visualised on eight scales with two extremes. (Meyer 2015, 15-18) According to respondents' answers, selected countries are placed on scales relative to each other.

Furthermore, the research aims to find out the most common symptoms of culture shock respondents experience. The questionnaire takes into account symptoms described in an online article *The 7 Symptoms of Culture Shock – Identifying Them and Getting Ahead of the Problem* released by InternationalRelationsEDU.org (International Relations EDU 2019), the symptoms described in *Intercultural Communication* (Jandt 2001, 342) and *Intercultural Business Communication*. (Chaney and Martin 2007, 74)

7.1.1   Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire includes twelve close-ended questions structured into three sections. The first section contains two introductory questions. The first question determines respondents' nationality while the second question reveals the country into which they travelled. If respondents travelled to two countries, they filled out two separate questionnaires. The main body consists of eight questions, each dealing with a selected cultural dimension. The third section includes a multiple-choice question to identify symptoms of culture shock and the last question deals with respondents' preparation for international business trips. The questionnaire does not include open-ended questions to minimize respondents' unwillingness to answer or their inability to respond to more complex questions.

7.1.2   Respondent Characteristics

The questionnaire was sent to 23 respondents from selected countries. The research sample comprises people employed in multicultural organizations with regional headquarters, sales and marketing departments, and manufacturing facilities located in Germany, China and Slovakia. The sample includes highly qualified employees who have completed studies in higher education. They occupy positions in purchasing, customer service, research and development, engineering and management department. The majority of respondents occupy managerial positions (in particular: quality manager, operations engineering manager, operations and maintenance manager, global supply chain manager, product manager energy conversion, research and development manager), engineering positions (supply quality engineer, industrial engineer, instrumentation and control engineer, automation process engineer), purchasing positions (operational purchaser, strategic purchaser) and other (production planning specialist, customer support specialist, sales representative, customer service representative). The important criterion for selection is the fact that respondents travelled to Germany, China or Slovakia on international business trips.

7.2 Data Collection

The questionnaire was sent via e-mail to each respondent in the form of a Microsoft Word document. Refraining from the use of an online survey eliminates issues connected to its accessibility through a website. All e-mails were sent between 1st December and 31st December 2018. Respondents were sending e-mails with filled out questionnaires throughout the next two months. The last questionnaire received on 18th February 2019 concluded the data collection. The opportunity to address selected respondents arose during practical training in one of the multinational companies where email and face-to-face communication with German, Chinese and Slovak employees as a part of the job description was established.

7.3 Data Analysis

A table with three sections was created to analyse the collected data. In the first section, answers to the first and the second question were divided according to respondents' nationality and countries of their stay. The second section was divided into three columns dealing with answers to each country separately. The third section included the last two questions. Question number 11 was analysed irrespective of respondents' nationality while the answers to question number 12 were divided according to respondents' nationality. After

calculating the total number of answers to each question and each country, percentages were calculated and used in corresponding figures and tables.

7.4 Research Challenges

The main issue was the unwillingness of respondents to answer the questionnaire's more complex questions which required recalling specific events. Moreover, answering questions dealing with cultural dimensions seemed difficult and required further explanation as many aspects of culture are perceived on a subconscious level. Respondents were asked to actively think about cultural differences and behavioural patterns they observed during their travels which led to confusions and misunderstandings. Consequently, further email communication with some respondents was required.

8   RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings are analysed, respondents' answers to questions number 1 to 12 are explained in detail and the collected data are displayed in corresponding figures and tables. The last section summarizes the research findings and compares the countries to each other.

8.1 Question Number 1: "What is your nationality?"

Question number 1 aims to find out respondents' nationality which enables the last question of the questionnaire (respondents' preparation for international business trips) to be analysed. The selected sample included respondents of German, Chinese and Slovak nationality; therefore, respondents chose one of three answers to the close-ended question. The questionnaire was answered by 26.1% of the German, 34.8% of the Chinese and 39.1% of the Slovak respondents. The most respondents were of Slovak nationality and the least respondents were of German nationality, however, the proportion of nationalities is relatively balanced. The percentages of selected nationalities are displayed in Figure 4.
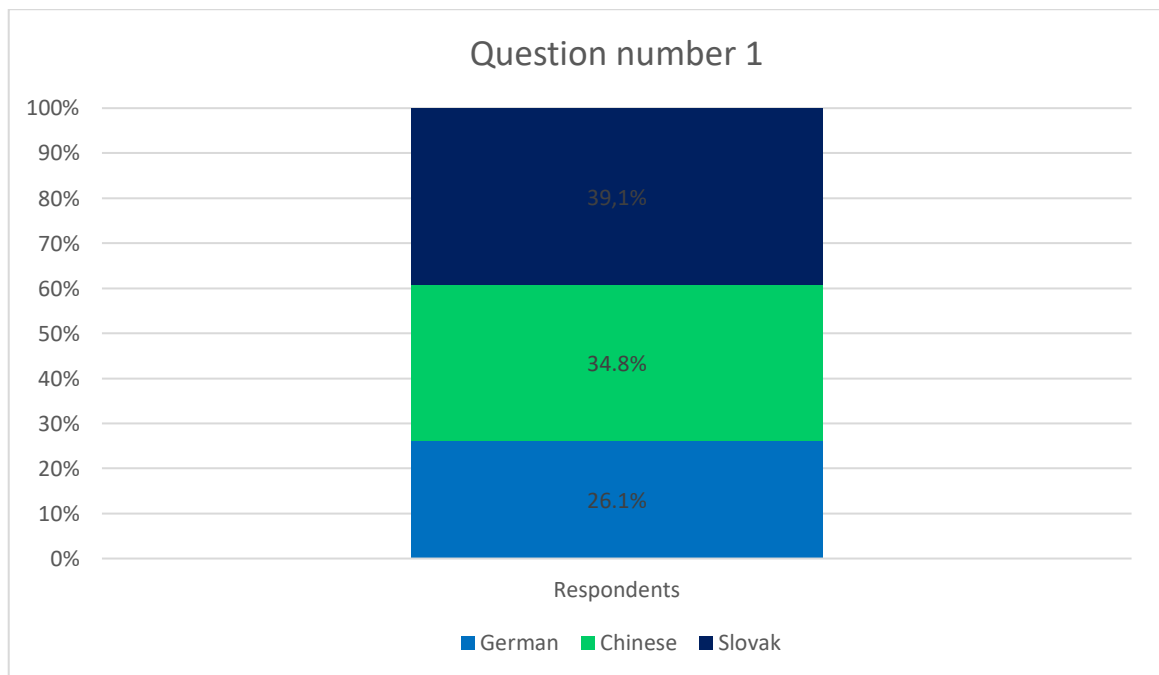

Figure 4 Question number 1: "What is your nationality?" (Source: own research)

8.2 Question Number 2: "In which of these countries have you been during your business trip?"

Question number 2 aims to find out to which country respondents travelled. Identifying the country allows an analysis of questions number 3 to 10 which deal with cultural dimensions. Respondents chose one option, excluding the option of their home country. Respondents who travelled to two countries filled in two questionnaires (the second questionnaire did not include question number 11) which results in a higher number of questionnaires than the number of respondents.
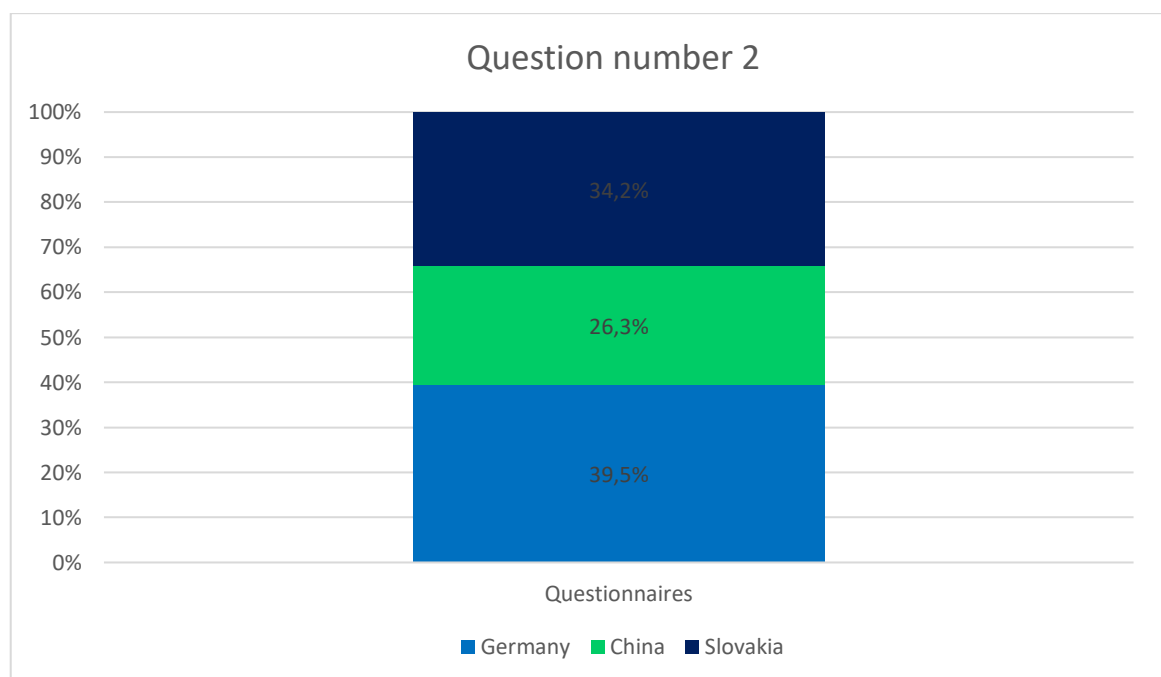
Figure 5 Question number 2: "In which of these countries have you been during your business trip?" (Source: own research)

Figure 5 shows that 39.5% of respondents travelled to Germany, 26.3% travelled to China and 34.2% travelled to Slovakia. Table 1 displays the total of 38 questionnaires filled in by 23 respondents. Particularly, 15 questionnaires were filled in regarding Germany, 10 regarding China and 13 regarding Slovakia. Out of the 38 questionnaires, 14 questionnaires were filled in by Slovak, 11 by German and 14 by Chinese respondents.

Table 1 Question number 2: "In which of these countries have you been during your business trip?"

Nationality	Country			
	Slovakia	Germany	China	Questionnaires filled by nationality
Slovak		9	5	14
German	6		5	11
Chinese	7	6		13
Questionnaires regarding country	13	15	10	38

(Source: own research)

8.3 Question Number 3: "Effective communication is perceived as more:"

Question number 3 determines the effective communication style based on respondents' interactions with local employees. The countries are placed on a communicating scale with two opposites – low-context cultures with explicit and direct communication, and high-context cultures preferring implicit and indirect communication. Respondents chose one from the following options:

a. precise, simple and clear communication, messages are summarized and repeated

b. indirect communication, speaking and reading between the lines, messages are implied.

According to Figure 6, all respondents experienced explicit communication in Germany and Slovakia. They are considered low-context countries with communication lacking the knowledge of a shared context. Everything is spelt out and messages are repeated. However, 60% of respondents who travelled to China experienced direct communication while 40% experienced indirect communication which requires the knowledge of a shared context to understand the implied messages. China belongs to one of the most explicit Asian countries concerning its communication style, although, it is still important to read between the lines and pay attention to non-verbal cues and clues. Considering international business communication, there is an overall shift towards explicit communication style as a result of the same groups of people negotiating together over a longer period of time and adapting their communication to minimize misunderstandings.
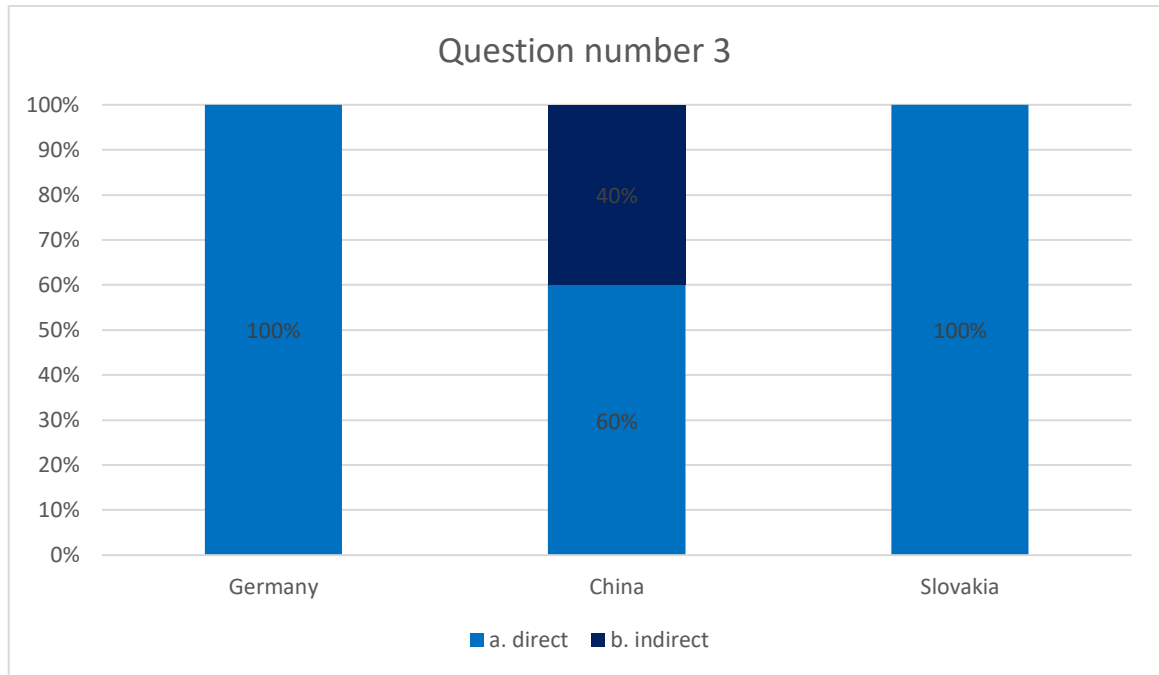
Figure 6 Question number 3: "Effective communication is perceived as:"

(Source: own research)

8.4 Question Number 4: "What type of feedback did you experience?"

Question number 4 deals with feedback and employee evaluation. Countries are placed on an evaluating scale with two opposites – countries with direct feedback and countries preferring indirect feedback. Respondents chose one of the following options:

a. honest, direct feedback given explicitly (even in front of other colleagues)

b. indirect, implied feedback given implicitly (only in a private setting).

Figure 7 shows that 93.3% of respondents experienced direct feedback in Germany and 84.6% in Slovakia. It is crucial to state the message clearly to effectively deal with misunderstandings and facilitate employees' progress. Employee evaluation and feedback are given both in private and public setting. On the other hand, 80% of respondents experienced indirect feedback in China. It is fundamental to use subtle evaluation style and give implied feedback in privacy to facilitate group harmony and avoid the loss of face. The preferred type of feedback differs across cultures, therefore, it is vital to correct and adapt the feedback.
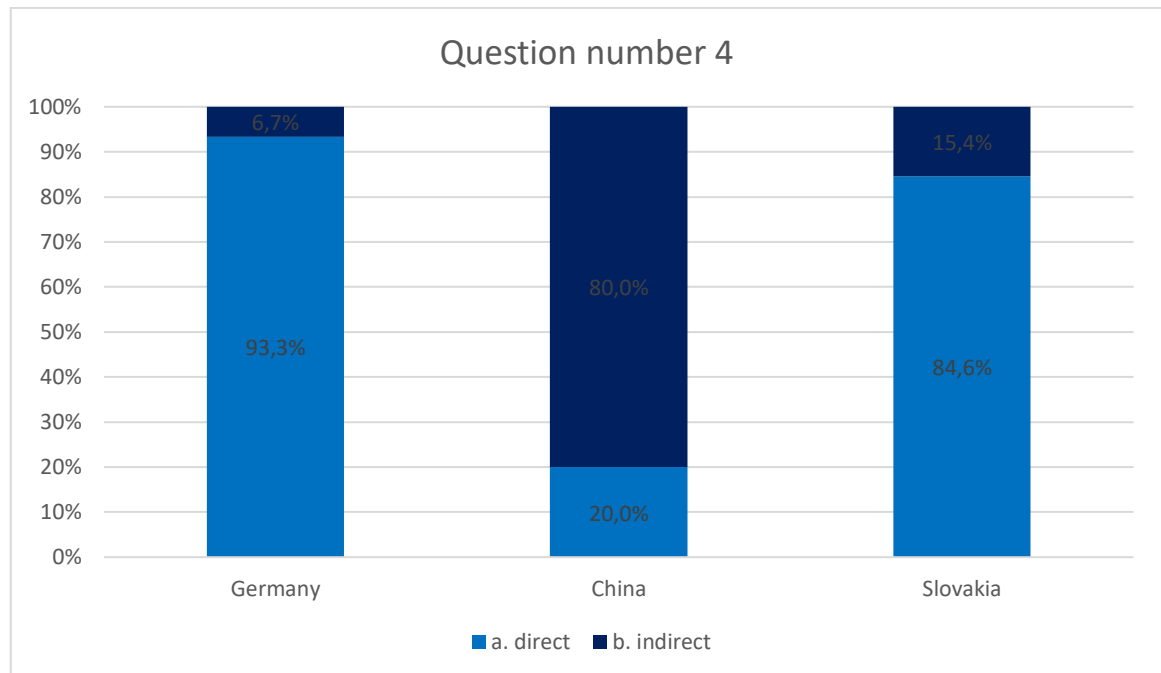
Figure 7 Question number 4: "What type of feedback did you experience?"

(Source: own research)

8.5 Question Number 5: "Did you experience open disagreements during which your ideas were openly challenged?"

Question number 5 aims to find out whether respondents experienced disagreements and confrontations. Countries are placed between two opposites of a disagreeing scale – confrontational cultures and cultures avoiding confrontation. Respondents had to choose one option:

a. yes

b. no.

Figure 8 shows that 73.3% of respondents experienced confrontations in Germany and 76.9% in Slovakia. Disagreements in Germany and Slovakia are a common part of communication as openly stating different opinions encourages progress. On the other hand, 70% of respondents did not experience confrontations in China. The research findings confirm that the Chinese perceive disagreements as a disruption in communication which may harm relationships and disrupt group harmony.
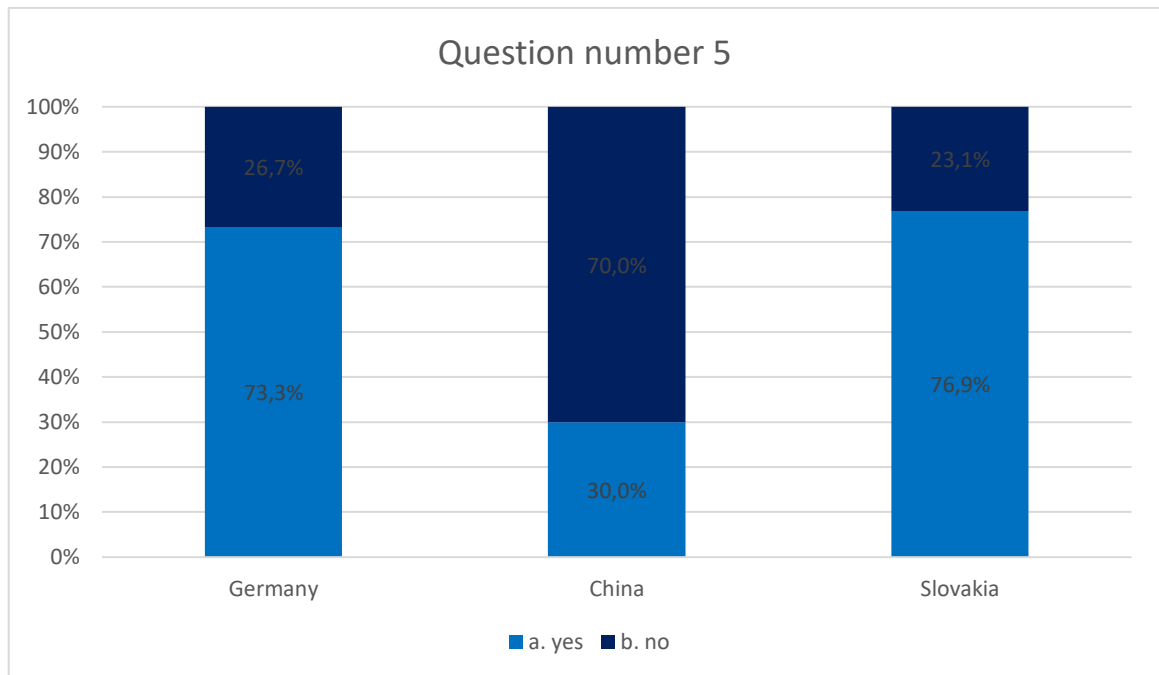
Figure 8 Question number 5: "Did you experience open disagreements during which your ideas were openly challenged?" (Source: own research)

8.6 Question Number 6: "In what way trust is built?"

Question number 6 determines how employees build trust by placing countries on a trusting scale with two opposites – task-based trust and relationship-based trust. In the middle of the scale are countries which combine task- and relationship-based trust. Respondents chose one option from the following:

a. it is important to build long-term personal relationships

b. important are a person's activities related to business, his/her accomplishments, skills and reliability

c. both building long-term relationships and person's business activities are equally important.

Figure 9 shows that 73.3% of respondents experienced both types of trust-building in Germany while the remaining 26.7% chose task-based trust. Similarly, 76.9% of respondents experienced trust-building in Slovakia based on relationships and reliability at work. In addition, 15.4% chose the task-based trust and 7.7% chose relationship-based trust. Lastly, 70% of respondents chose both types of trust-building as equally important in China while 30% chose relationship-based trust. All in all, the majority of respondents believe trust requires both an individual's skills and knowledge as well as personal relationships.
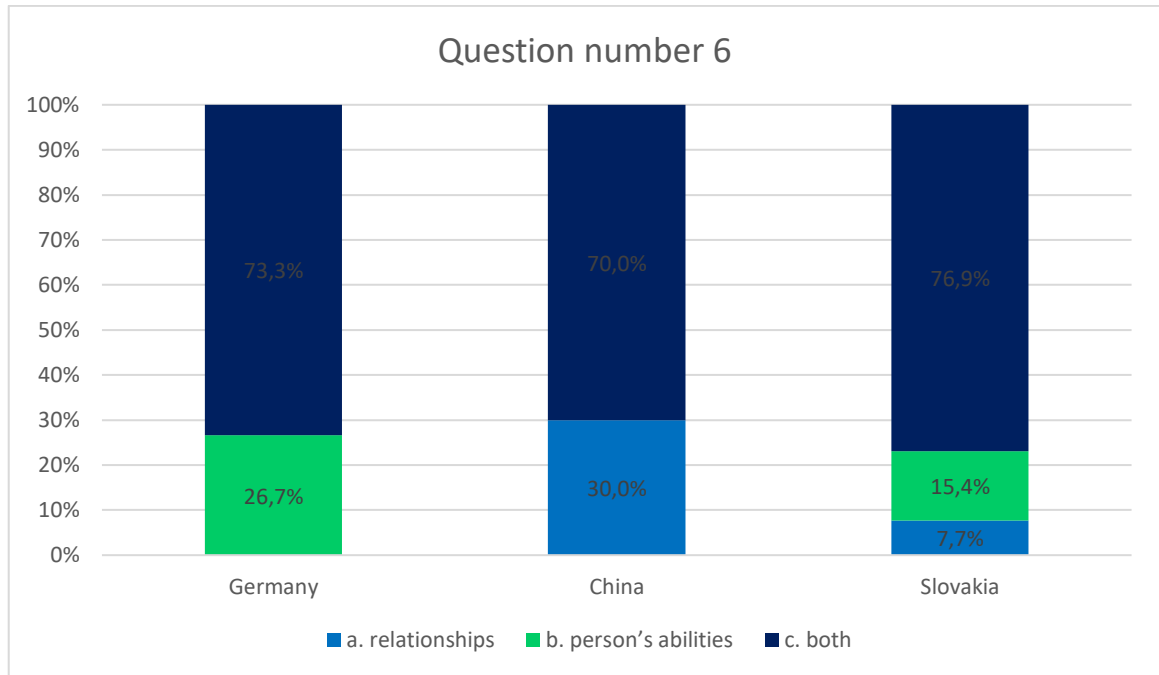
Figure 9 Question number 6: "In what way trust is built?" (Source: own research)

8.7 Question Number 7: "What is important when people express their ideas in order to persuade others?"

Question number 7 focuses on persuasion styles by placing countries on a persuading scale with two opposites – the principles-first approach where theory is explained prior giving real examples and the applications-first approach which provides real-life examples supported by theory in the end. Holistic thinking is included as Asian persuasion techniques focus on explaining the interconnectedness of elements. Respondents chose one from the following options:

a. giving real examples of situations

b. explaining the theory, principles and concepts used

c. explaining the big picture in detail, how everything is connected.

Figure 10 shows that 46.6% of respondents experienced the applications-first approach in Germany while 26.7% experienced the principles-first approach. The remaining 26.7% chose the holistic approach. Regarding China, 40% of respondents chose the applications-first, 40% opted for the principles-first approach while the remaining 20% chose the holistic approach. Lastly, 38.5% of respondents chose the applications-first approach in Slovakia, another 38.5% opted for the principles-first approach and 23% chose the holistic approach. All in all, the majority of answers were equally divided between the applications-first and

the principles-first persuasion styles, possibly as a result of adapted persuasive techniques to increase the success rate of international business negotiations.
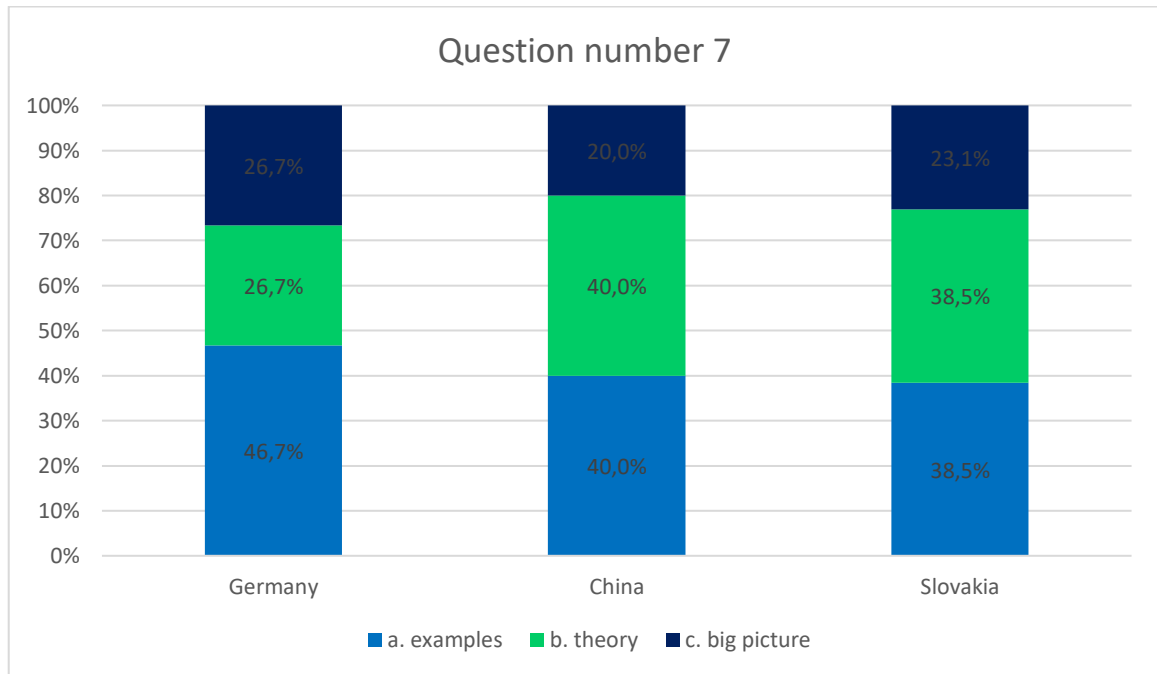

Figure 10 Question number 7: "What is important when people express their ideas in order to persuade others?" (Source: own research)

8.8 Question Number 8: "A leader is perceived as someone who:"

Question number 8 aims to determine a type of leader and leadership in Chinese, German and Slovak organizations. Countries are placed on a leading scale with two opposites – egalitarian leadership with an equal leader and hierarchical leadership with a leader who has full power (autocratic leadership) or shares power (democratic leadership). Respondents chose one from the following options:

a. gives orders, has full power and authority, his/her ideas cannot be challenged

b. gives orders, does not have full power and authority, his/her ideas can be challenged

c. is an equal member, shares his/her ideas with others, open disagreements are welcome.

Figure 11 shows that in Germany, 46.7% of respondents experienced egalitarian, 33.3% experienced democratic and 20% experienced autocratic leadership. In China, autocratic leadership prevails according to 90% of respondents. Only 10% experienced democratic leadership. Lastly, Slovak leaders are democratic according to 53.8% and egalitarian according to 46.2% of respondents. In conclusion, Germans favour equality, however, larger organizations prefer hierarchical structure with a strong leader. Slovak leaders are a mix of

hierarchical and egalitarian, sharing power with subordinates. German and Slovak leadership empowers subordinates by delegating decisions. However, the Chinese leadership is strongly hierarchical with leaders having full authority, power and respect.
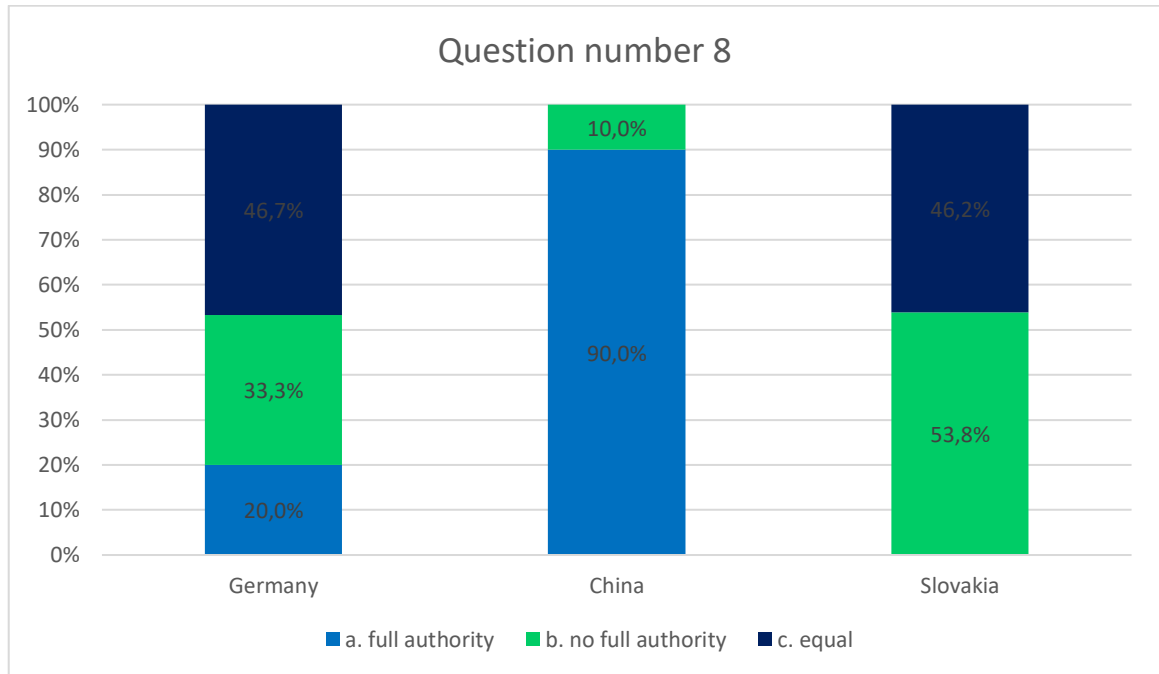

Figure 11 Question number 8: "A leader is perceived as someone who:"

(Source: own research)

8.9 Question Number 9: "How are the final decisions reached?"

Question number 9 connects leadership styles with decision-making processes. Countries are placed on a deciding scale with two opposites – consensual and top-down decision-making. Respondents chose one from the following options:

a. a group decides

b. an individual decides, usually a boss.

Figure 12 shows that 53.3% of respondents experienced group decision-making while 46.7% experienced individual decision-making in Germany. Regarding China, 90% of respondents chose top-down decision-making. In Slovakia, 61.5% of respondents experienced consensual while 38.5% chose top-down decision-making. All in all, German leaders decide individually as well as in groups. While Slovaks prefer group agreements, the Chinese favour decisions made by an individual with the highest authority.
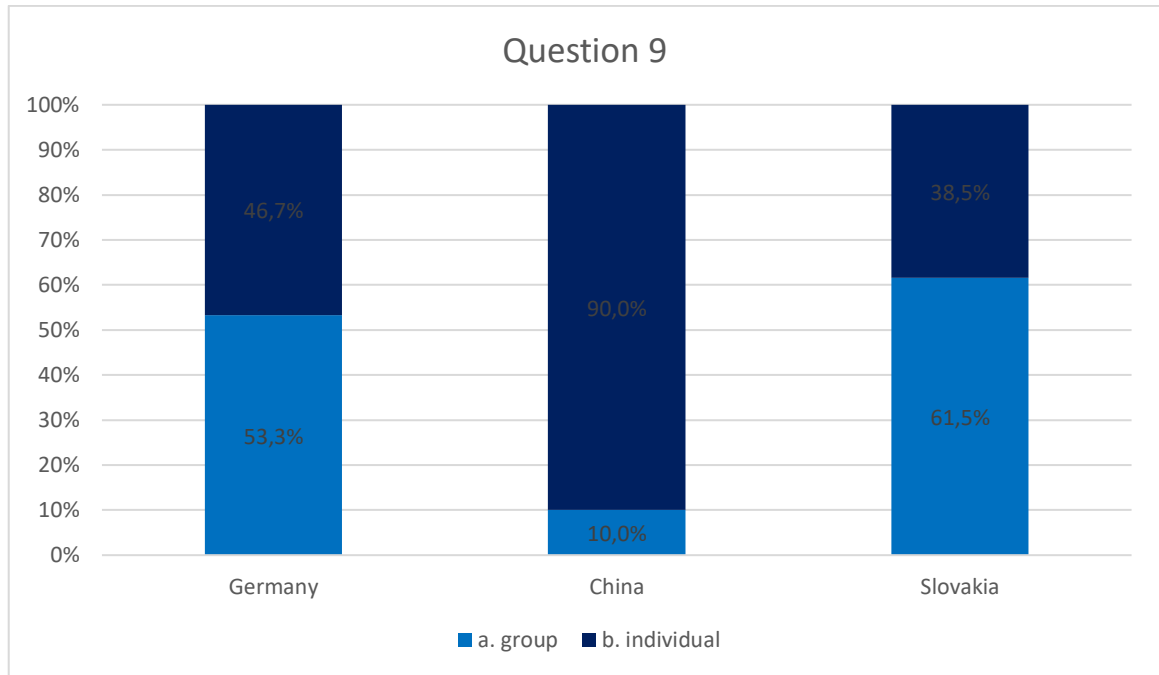
Figure 12 Question number 9: "How are the final decisions reached?"

(Source: own research)

8.10 Question Number 10: "When scheduling business meetings/negotiations and meeting deadlines, it is important to:"

Question number 10 deals with time perception, including scheduling, flexibility and adaptability. Countries are placed on a scheduling scale with two opposites – linear-time and flexible-time scheduling. Respondents chose one from the following options:

a. stick to a fixed schedule, deal with only 1 task at once

b. be flexible and able to deal with more tasks at once due to changes in schedule.

According to Figure 13, 66.7% of respondents believe Germany follows linear-time scheduling. According to 60% of respondents, the Chinese prefer flexible scheduling. Slovak scheduling is perceived as flexible by 61.5% of respondents. In conclusion, Germans stick to tight schedules and detailed plans. Meeting deadlines and avoiding delays is vital as they concentrate on one task at once. The Chinese and Slovaks are more flexible and able to adapt to new circumstances. Employees multitask and deal with interruptions in schedules.
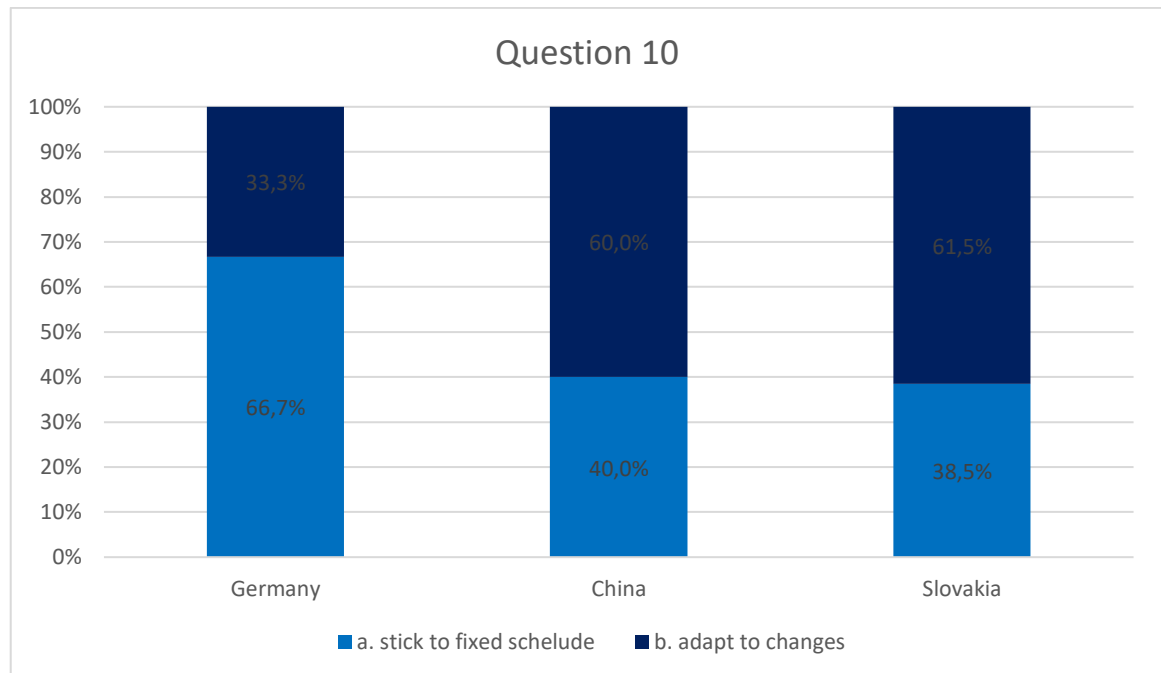
Figure 13 Question number 10: "When scheduling business meetings/negotiations and meeting deadlines, it is important to:" (Source: own research)

8.11 Question Number 11: "In what ways did you experience culture shock?"

Question number 11 finds out the most common symptoms of culture shock. Respondents chose multiple options from the following:

a. fatigue

b. aches and pains

c. fear

d. anxiety

e. depression

f. irritability

g. homesickness

h. negative feelings towards the host culture

i. self-doubt

j. I did not experience any symptoms of culture shock.

According to Figure 14, only 4 out of 23 respondents did not experience any symptoms. On the other hand, the majority of respondents dealt with anxiety, heightened irritability, depression and homesickness. In detail, respondents experienced heightened anger and frustrations, frequent mood swings and hostility towards others. They felt helpless and

lonely, often lacked the motivation to complete their tasks at work. Moreover, excessive concern with health, cleanliness of surroundings, drinking water and the quality of food was commonly experienced. Lastly, respondents felt homesick which resulted in their dependency on co-nationals and the unwillingness to form new relationships.
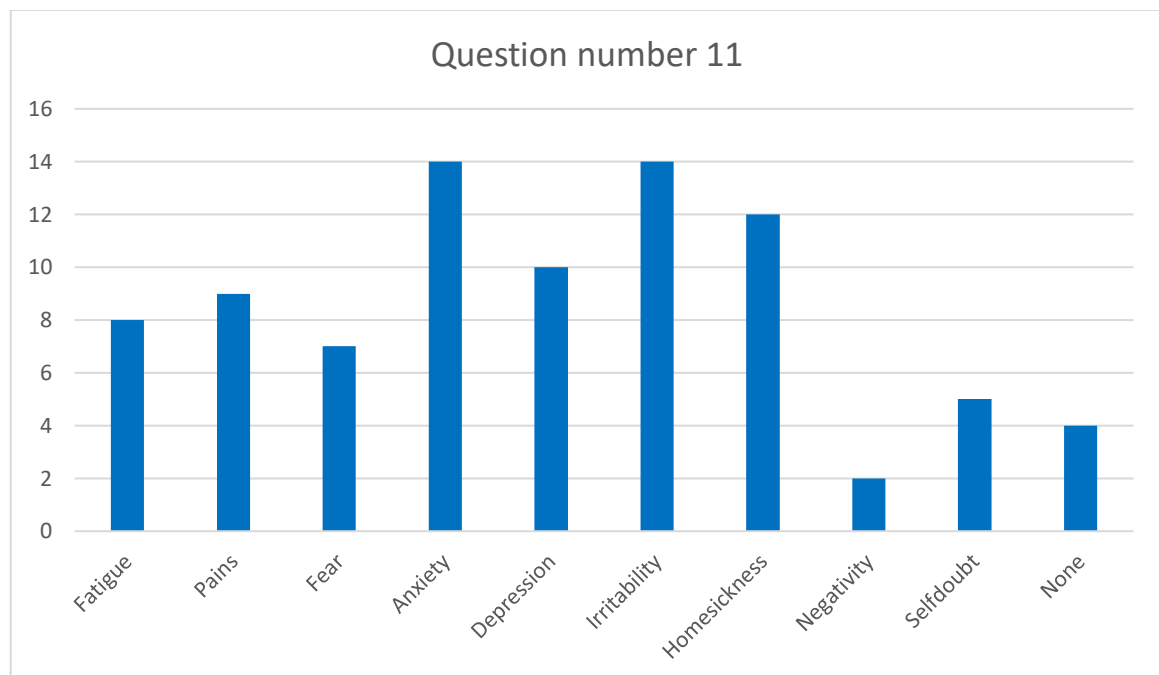

Figure 14 Question number 11: "In what ways did you experience culture shock?" (Source: own research)

8.12 Question Number 12: "Does your home company offer courses, lessons or other forms of preparation for business trips in other countries?"

Question number 12 finds out whether organizations prepared their employees for international business trips in forms of lectures, courses or training. Respondents chose one option:

a. yes

b. no.

In case respondents underwent a preparation, the question further deals with their satisfaction with the preparation. Respondents chose one option:

a1. they are sufficient

a2. they are not sufficient enough.

In case no preparation was offered, respondents chose one option:

b1. I would appreciate them

b2. I would not appreciate them.

According to Figure 15, 81.8% of respondents were dissatisfied with their preparation while only 18.2% of respondents were satisfied. Moreover, all respondents who were not offered any preparation would appreciate training in the future.
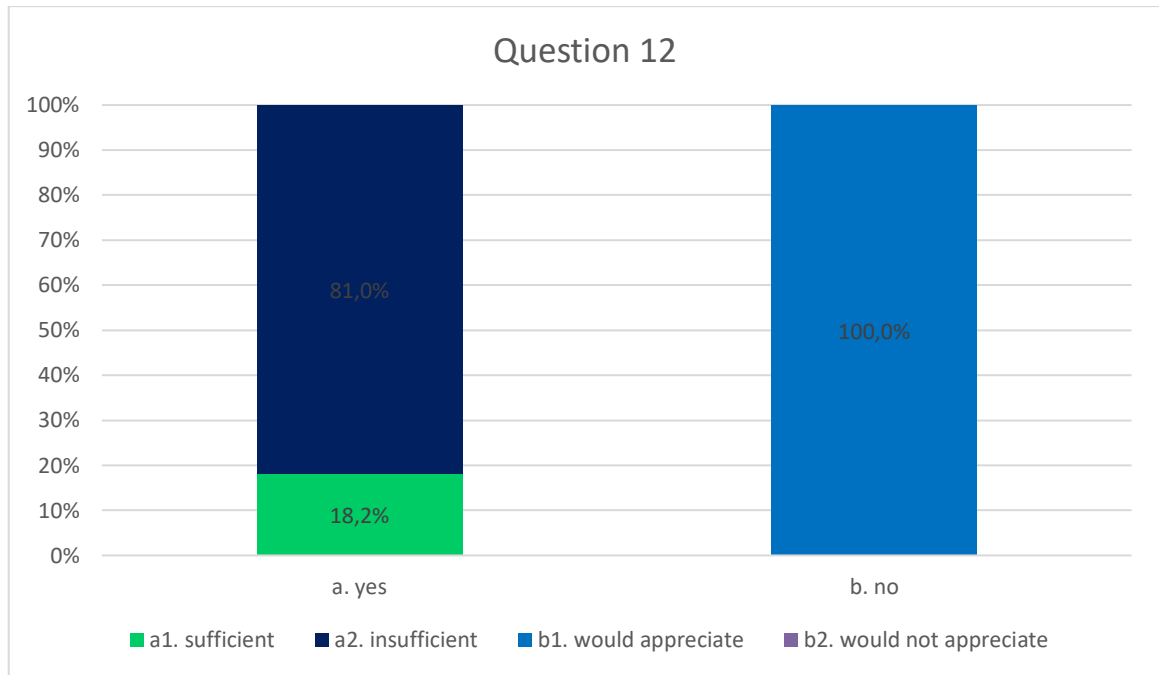

Figure 15 Question number 12: "Does your home company offer courses, lessons, or other forms of preparation for business trips in other countries?" (Source: own research)

Table 2 shows that 9 out of 11 respondents who underwent preparation were dissatisfied. The majority of Slovaks were not offered any preparation. Moreover, 12 respondents without any preparation would appreciate courses on minimizing culture shock, improving intercultural communication and negotiation skills.

Table 2 Question number 12: "Does your home company offer courses, lessons, or other forms of preparation for business trips in other countries?"

Nationality	Does your home company offer preparation for business trips?			
	Yes		No	
	sufficient	insufficient	would appreciate	would not appreciate
German	1	3	2	0
Chinese	1	4	3	0
Slovak	0	2	7	0

(Source: own research)

8.13 Summary of the Questionnaire Survey

Research findings prove that German, Chinese, and Slovak cultures vary significantly in selected cultural dimensions. Germany and Slovakia show similar results in a communicating, evaluating and disagreeing scale. Both countries communicate explicitly and often repeat messages. Open disagreements are considered an essential part of progress in organizations. Giving direct feedback publicly is common. On the other hand, Chinese communication requires reading between the lines and understanding shared context. Chinese people avoid confrontations and give implied feedback to maintain harmony.

Selected countries show similar results in trust-building and persuading styles. Trust is based on both personal relationships and individuals' accomplishments at work. While Germans lean towards task-based trust, the Chinese prefer relationship-based trust. Moreover, applications-first and principles-first persuasion styles are applied in all countries.

Cultural differences are visible on a leading and deciding scale. Leadership styles in Germany and Slovakia are egalitarian and democratic, therefore, decision-making is made either by an individual or a group of people. However, leaders in China are autocratic and fully responsible for all decisions. The differences on a scheduling scale show the punctuality of Germans who depend on fixed schedules, and flexibility of the Chinese and Slovaks who tend to multitask and quickly adapt to changes.

Considering the symptoms of culture shock, respondents dealt mainly with anxiety, heightened irritability and anger, excessive concern over cleanness and health, depression, loneliness and homesickness.

9 ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on research findings, following research questions are answered:

RQ1: Are there significant cultural differences between Germany, China and Slovakia concerning selected cultural dimensions?

Research findings prove the presence of significant cultural differences between selected countries, mainly in communication style, time perception, leadership style and decision-making. In particular, Germany and China differ in the majority of selected cultural dimensions, the most crucial being the perception of effective communication and confrontations. Slovakia perceives effective communication, employee evaluation and confrontations in a similar way as Germany, however, time perception in Slovakia is similar to China's.

RQ2: Is culture shock a barrier to intercultural business communication?

According to research findings, German, Chinese and Slovak cultures vary in many aspects. Due to cultural distance of each country, respondents dealt with significant cultural differences upon their arrival to the host country. Majority of them experienced serious physical and psychical symptoms of culture shock. They faced challenging situations when conducting business while dealing with severe symptoms of culture shock. The most frequently experienced symptoms were depression, homesickness, anxiety, fatigue, fear and self-doubt. According to answers to question number 5 as well as further email communication with a small number of respondents, they revealed that they were often unable to understand the intended meaning of communicated messages during intercultural contact. Unsuccessful communication was accompanied with frustrations and communication break-downs which resulted in prolonged negotiation processes. In some cases, individuals had to travel back and forth multiple times to clear misunderstandings and ensure organization's workflow. Some individuals experienced open confrontations. They faced different approaches to leadership, decision-making, giving feedback and negotiation styles in organizations. Cultural differences they faced, confusions and disagreements they experienced strongly affected their inability to conduct business, successfully conclude negotiations in time, which had an impact on the success of their organization. According to respondents' answers, culture shock they experienced during their stay in a host country posed a barrier to intercultural business communication.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

Primary research results revealed significant cultural differences between selected countries which caused respondents to experience culture shock during international business trips. Due to frequent cross-cultural travels, it is crucial to improve employees' intercultural communication skills and eliminate symptoms of culture shock. Research findings highlight the lack of possibilities for employee preparation and its insufficiency despite a high demand. Consequently, the majority of respondents suffered from various symptoms of culture shock.

Multinational organizations depend on the success of their employees during international business trips, thus should focus on improving their communication skills and cultural competence by devoting funding and time to introduce international communication training. Such training, led by professionals in cross-cultural fields, is based on problem-solving exercises focused on real-life situations. Trainees actively participate and personalize their training by incorporating their ideas and experiences. As a result, training provides a better understanding of cultural differences and helps to deal with misunderstandings and confrontations based on them.

According to research results, respondents believe that trust-building is interconnected with building relationships. Therefore, organizations as well as individuals should focus on building long-term relationships at the workplace by organizing activities outside work (such as team building and games) which encourage employees to get to know each other on a personal level.

The results show the striking differences in what is considered as adequate type feedback. Thus, courses provided by organizations should be aimed at improving communication skills with respect to employee evaluation and their ability to adjust their approach in giving the adequate type of feedback.

Furthermore, it is vital to focus on lifelong education and introduce team building aimed at improving international business negotiations skills as well as acquiring intercultural competence.

Lastly, printing manuals with information and useful tips on intercultural negotiations (what to do and what to avoid in a certain situations), including description of negotiation stages in detail, is a quick and efficient way to prepare employees for their international business trips in a specific country.

CONCLUSION

The Bachelor thesis provided a theoretical background to understanding terms concerning culture and its dimensions, intercultural communication and its barriers as well as culture shock as one of the barriers to intercultural business communication. Primary research in the form of a questionnaire was conducted to determine differences in chosen cultural dimensions between selected countries. Research results uncovered the most problematic areas of intercultural contact on a business level. The research also determined if, and in what ways, business people experience culture shock as part of their business trips.

Research results clearly show the areas in which selected cultures differ, misunderstandings and conflicts arise, and intercultural communication tends to break down. Moreover, the findings show the lack of preparation for business trips from organizations' side, which may only contribute to their employees' inability to understand cultural differences, successfully communicate and conduct business internationally. Lastly, research findings prove that the majority of respondents are affected by culture shock on a personal as well as professional level. Business people suffer from various symptoms of culture shock which has a negative impact on the basic, yet their most crucial ability – the ability to communicate. Therefore, the Bachelor thesis provides recommendations for individuals as well as organizations to learn about cultures they do business in and improve intercultural communication by eliminating culture shock.

As mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, culture affects people's lives in all ways, from their way of thinking, their behaviour, to their economic and government systems. Hall even considers culture and communication as one. Therefore, (not only in business sphere) it is crucial to understand areas in which cultures differ, learn about the differences and actively deal with culture shock as a part of intercultural communication. Only then, organizations and individuals can successfully communicate, negotiate, form lasting intercultural relationships and improve their overall intercultural business contact. The goal of the Bachelor thesis was met.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire 1

Choose only 1 answer to each question. Insert your answer in a checkbox.

1. What is your nationality?

☐ Chinese

☐ German

☐ Slovak

2. In which of these countries have you been during your business trip?

(if you are German) ☐ Slovakia ☐ China

(if you are Slovak) ☐ Germany ☐ China

(if you are Chinese) ☐ Germany ☐ Slovakia

If you have been in 2 countries, please answer questions in Questionnaire 1 regarding one country. Then answer the same questions in Questionnaire 2 regarding the second country.

Answer the following questions based on your personal experiences in CHOSEN COUNTRY:

3. Effective communication is perceived as more:

☐ a. precise, simple and clear communication, messages are summarized and repeated

☐ b. indirect communication, speaking and reading between the lines, messages are implied

4. What type of feedback did you experience?

☐ a. honest, direct feedback given explicitly (even in front of other colleagues)

☐ b. indirect, implied feedback given implicitly (only in a private setting)

5. Did you experience open disagreements during which your ideas were openly chal-
lenged?

☐ a. yes

☐ b. no

6. In what way trust is built?

☐ a. it is important to build long-term personal relationships

☐ b. important are person´s activities related to business, his/her accomplishments, skills
and reliability

☐ c. both building long-term relationships and a person´s business activities are equally
important

7. What is important when people express their ideas in order to persuade others?

☐ a. giving real examples of situations

☐ b. explaining the theory, principles and concepts used

☐ c. explaining the big picture in detail, how everything is connected

8. A leader is perceived as someone who:

☐ a. gives orders, has full power and authority, his/her ideas cannot be challenged

☐ b. gives orders, does not have full power and authority, his/her ideas can be challenged

☐ c. is an equal member, shares his/her ideas with others, open disagreements are welcome

9. How are the final decisions reached?

☐ a. a group decides

☐ b. an individual decides, usually a boss

10. When scheduling business meetings/negotiations and meeting deadlines, it is im-
portant to:

☐ a. stick to a fixed schedule, deal with only 1 task at once

☐ b. be flexible and able to deal with more tasks at once due to changes in schedule

11. In what ways did you experience culture shock?

☐ a. fatigue (*excessive sleep, tiredness, lethargy, feeling overwhelmed*)

☐ b. aches and pains (*headache, stomach ache, sickness, sleep disturbances, reappearance of chronic pains*)

☐ c. fear (*of physical contact, of being robbed / injured / cheated*)

☐ d. anxiety (*excessive concern over cleanness – drinking water / eating food / clean dishes / clean bedding, excessive washing of hands, excessive concern over health*)

☐ e. depression (*loneliness, lack of motivation, feeling of a loss of identity, helplessness, failure to finish tasks*)

☐ f. irritability (*anger over delays, frustrations, annoyance, hostility, assuming the worst, impulsiveness, mood swings*)

☐ g. homesickness (*longing for home / friends / family / going back to familiar routines, glazed stare, daydreaming, dependence on long-term residents of one's own nationality, focusing on relationships with same-cultured people*)

☐ h. negative feelings towards the host culture (*criticism of local culture, blaming members of the other culture, the need to withdraw from foreign people and culture, refusal to learn the foreign language, stereotyping, idealizing home culture*)

☐ i. self-doubt (*shyness, insecurity, questioning the decision to do this work, questioning long-held beliefs – religion, morality, core beliefs*)

☐ j. I did not experience any symptoms of culture shock

12. Does your home company offer courses, lessons, or other forms of preparation for business trips in other countries?

☐ a. yes   ☐ a1. they are sufficient

              ☐ a2. they are not sufficient enough

☐ b. no   ☐ b1. I would appreciate them

              ☐ b2. I would not appreciate them

Thank you for your time!

Questionnaire 2

Choose only 1 answer to each question. Insert your answer in a checkbox.

1. What is your nationality?

☐ Chinese

☐ German

☐ Slovak

2. In which of these countries have you been during your business trip?

 (if you are German) ☐ Slovakia ☐ China

(if you are Slovak) ☐ Germany ☐ China

(if you are Chinese) ☐ Germany ☐ Slovakia

Answer the following questions based on your personal experiences in CHOSEN COUNTRY:

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