

Language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation as part of cross-cultural communication competence

A study of an ethnically diverse team in a multinational company in Sweden

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Abstract

Purpose: Our purpose is to study how language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation affect ethnically diverse teams in their cross-cultural communication competence.

Methodology: The data was collected through six interviews of team members working in a product development project in a multinational company. The interviews were conducted in March of 2012. The data analysis followed an interpretative thematic analysis inspired by Boyatzis (1998). To analyze the data we have utilized some steps of the thematic analysis. With the analysis it was identified that ethnically diverse teams build language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation.

Findings: The findings from this research indicate that cross-cultural adaptation and language proficiency should be considered as important dimensions of cross-cultural communication competence within ethnically diverse teams. Language proficiency remains a challenge for many ethnically diverse teams and should be included in studies related to communication. Employees' ability to adapt to the current environment and culture has an essential impact on team communication.

Research limitations/implications: The research was done in a Multinational company based in Sweden within one team at Electrolux AB, therefore implications from our study may not be applicable to all ethnically diverse teams in Multinational companies globally.

Practical implications: This research clearly states that the employees' language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation play a critical role in how communication flows within ethnically diverse teams.

Originality/value: Researchers have stated that language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation have become forgotten factors, although they are crucial to communication within ethnically diverse teams.

Keywords: Ethnically diverse teams, language proficiency, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural communication competence, multinational companies (MNCs).

Paper type: Master thesis within Business Administration.

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1. Introduction

Many multinational companies (MNCs) located in Sweden have been considering introducing the concept of diversity since the 1990's without any measurable efforts being made (Fägerlind, 2012). Due to changes in European populations and increase in multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic populations, workplace diversity has become a priority for many companies and organizations across the continent (Singh and Point, 2004). As society and business become more ethnically diverse, there is a case of further study in this area. Additionally, many new work forms have been developed to utilize ethnically diverse talent in MNCs (Larsen, 1998).

A diverse team is a group of two or more people and typically refers to demographic differences of one sort or another among group members (McGrath, Berdahl, and Arrow, 1995). Our intention is to study ethnically diverse teams, in which the main differentiation between the team members is their ethnic background. An ethnic group shares the same descent and heritage (Jandt, 2010). An ethnically diverse team is a team where the members come from two or more different ethnicities; these team members interact on a regular basis to achieve a common goal (Early and Gibson, 2002). This is the definition that we will use throughout this study.

We hope to learn how ethnically diverse teams build cross-cultural communication competence. According to Hofstede (2001) cross-cultural communication competence is built on a set of attributes such as awareness, knowledge and skills, which are attributes that can be taught. Personality is also another attribute that should be taken into account (Hofstede, 2001). Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006), argue that to possess cross-cultural communication competence you need to be able to affectively and appropriately interact with individuals from different nationalities. This competence is fundamental for successful communication between ethnically diverse team members (Wiseman, Hammer and Nishida, 1989).

Cross-cultural communication competence is a major factor in multicultural environments for successful interaction (Johnson et al, 2006). Cross-cultural communication competence is the ability to achieve an obligatory task effectively (Klemp, 1979). In a multicultural environment the person is required a higher degree of cross cultural communication competence to obtain information from a colleague (Matveev and Nelson, 2004). A communicatively competent team member in an ethnically diverse team is capable of establishing an interpersonal relationship with an individual from another culture, and successfully exchange at both verbal and non-verbal levels of behavior (Spitzberg, 1983). With cross-cultural communication competence, team members can express themselves more clearly and better understand each other and it increases the likelihood of high team performance. Cross-cultural communication competence can also improve decision-making and problem-solving capabilities in a global marketplace (Matveev and Nelson, 2004). In addition to the competencies included in the model, we added language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation as additional contributions to the cross-cultural communication competence model. In this thesis, language proficiency and language will be used interchangeably to refer to the same competency. The same applies to cross cultural adaptation and adaptation which also will be used interchangeably.

Since language proficiency in ethnically diverse teams in MNCs is understudied and a forgotten factor that should be considered, subsequently team members can face challenges because of the language of communication (Henderson, 2005). Cross-cultural adaptation is

important since it happens when a person moves from one culture to another and has to adapt to the norms and values of the new culture or environment (Jandt, 2010). Cross-cultural adaptation is strongly connected to the culture and behavior, if team members have a hard time to adapt the interaction between them will suffer (Anawati and Craig, 2006).

Although many scholars such as Singh and Point (2004), Williams and O'Reilly (2005), Larsen (1998) and McGrath, Berdahl, and Arrow, (1995) have studied many different types of diverse teams, research that examines teams from ethnically diverse perspectives has been lacking in the European context (Duriau and Takeuchi, 2000). Studies of ethnic diversity in teams are needed in Europe where diversity management has become important because of its diverse population; and companies are facing major challenges with managing various diverse teams as well as ethnically diverse teams (Singh and Point, 2004).

Singh and Point (2004) indicated the reasons why organizations should manage ethnically diverse teams in their study, which was based on 241 leading companies in eight European countries, where human resource managers came up with five reasons to why ethnically diverse teams are beneficial. The reasons that appeared included: better utilization of talent, increased market place understanding, enhanced breadth of understanding in leadership positions, enhanced creativity and increased quality of team problem-solving. Successful management of ethnically diverse teams can strengthen the reputation of a company by giving job seekers the impression that such companies are good places to work. Particularly, this study revealed that there are large differences across Europe in terms of managing ethnically diverse teams (Singh and Point, 2004). Therefore, once again we were convinced that there is a need for this kind of study in a Swedish context.

As we provide an understanding of cross cultural communication competence in ethnically diverse teams in a Swedish context, we have looked at the definition used in Sweden on diversity. Diversity in Sweden is referred to as our similarities and differences (Fägerlind, 2012). Diversity in the workplace is divided into two parts, quantity and quality. Quantity refers to the labor mix in the workplace, in terms of gender, age, ethnic and cultural backgrounds; and quality concerns the knowledge and experiences of the labor in the company. An indicator that there is a need for work to be done in Sweden within ethnic diversity is a statement by the organization Diversity Challenge: “ *Today, 20 percent of Sweden's population has a foreign background; in 15 years, that number will increase to 30 percent (Academic Search.se)*. Therefore, in the future there will be more need for ethnically diverse talent in Swedish MNCs: who will work in new forms such as ethnically diverse teams.

1.1 Problem Discussion

As a result of globalization and increased international economic activities, it has become more important than ever to have cross-cultural communication competence in ethnically diverse teams in MNCs (Jandt, 2010). To achieve effective work, ethnically diverse team members need to be aware of the cultures, personalities, conflict behaviors and life experiences of their team members when they interact (Triandis and Singelis, 1998). To study how teams communicate when they work together, researchers have proposed cross-cultural communication competence such as Matveev and Nelson (2004), Hofstede (2001), Collier (1989), Imahori and Lanigan (1989), Kealey (1989) and Lustig and Koester (1999)

Cross-cultural communication competence is about team members' ability to interact in ethnically diverse teams. This is important since it affects the performance of multicultural teams. They must have basic knowledge about team members' cultures and understand their personalities, conflict behavior and experience (Trinadis and Singelis, 1998) Individuals with cross-cultural communication competence are better able to communicate and work effectively within the team. They are able to deal with societal systems, establish interpersonal relationships and facilitate communication (Sptizberg, 1983). Today's global business requires excessive expertise and understanding of cultural diversity; cross-culturally competent team members perform more effectively and efficiently (Matveev and Nelson, 2004).

In addition to the theory, we employ the cross-cultural communication competence model developed by Matveev and Nelson (2004), which includes categories such as *interpersonal skills*; team members capability to acknowledge differences in communication and interactions styles; *team effectiveness*, refers to their capability to understand and define team goals, roles and norms; *cultural uncertainty*, team members ability to deal with cultural uncertainty and display patience; and *cultural empathy* is about their ability to understand and see the world from team members cultural perspectives.

Research on cross-cultural communication competence has left aside the role of language proficiency. Language proficiency is important because ethnically diverse team members may encounter barriers because of the level of language proficiency, since they might not understand the meaning of the symbols that are communicated. Since language is imbedded in culture, this can sometimes affect the new shared language; as team members may translate their ideas from their own native language to the new shared language (Chen and Kilmoski, 2003). Besides culture, team members' linguistic competence plays a role in how effective the communication is (Geluykens and Kraft, 2003). According to Henderson (2005), the area of language proficiency in ethnically diverse teams in MNCs is understudied and the language proficiency factor is often overlooked, therefore, the interpersonal interaction that takes place through language is not covered. Henderson (2005) argues that there is evidence that teams who work across languages can face challenges and tensions that can affect team work and relationship building.

Another important competency that is not covered in the communication between ethnically diverse team members is cross-cultural adaptation. According to Jandt (2010), cross-cultural adaptation takes place when a person moves from one culture to another and learns and applies the norms and the values of a new culture or environment. Adaptation is about behavior and culture and the more the cultures differ, the more difficult it is to interact (Anawati and Craig, 2006). In the case of the ethnically diverse team that we are studying, we focus on the significance of cross-cultural adaptation in cross cultural communication competence.

By studying this model in Sweden, we are able to contribute a new case study on ethnically diverse teams as it relates to cross cultural communication competence in a Swedish multinational setting.

Despite all the research that has been done on how to manage ethnically diverse teams; scholars such as Singh and Point (2004), argue that there has been little empirical research done. Since companies in Europe shifted from equality management to diversity management, this management imposes challenges in the building of a cross-cultural communication competence. If organizations manage differences and similarities, it can result in wide-ranging

opportunities, although costs also occur (Singh and Point, 2004). Hence, cross-cultural communication competence is essential to develop well-functioning ethnically diverse teams (Matveev and Nelson, 2004).

The value of effective cross-cultural communication has elevated because of growth of global commerce and work force diversity. With cross cultural communication competence, team members can express themselves clearly and better understand their colleagues, which enhances the likelihood of a higher quality in team performance (Matveev and Nelson, 2004). The literature has proven that successful performance of ethnically diverse teams is an essential contributor to organizational success (Williams and O'Reilly, 2005).

According to Larsson (2010), there is one major research group on intercultural communication in Sweden. The Swedish Network for research in inter-cultural communication (SNICC), which is an open network for theoreticians, and practitioners in intercultural communication. They contribute to the society by discussing unexplored challenges about people's culture and ethnicity in communication and social issues. They seek to find constructive ways to analyze the influence culture has on communication and how to create a sound intercultural interaction in workplaces. According to Larsson (2010) SNICC is the main contributing network in research in intercultural communication in Sweden. Therefore, there is a necessity for more research and development in intercultural communication in ethnically diverse teams. In addition to that, more researchers need to contribute to this research area to advance its' development (Larsson, 2010). The Canadian Ambassador to Sweden who attended a seminar on diversity: *“ Sweden is 40 years behind countries like the U.S, the UK and Canada when it comes to diversity and that's a lot of years ”* (Swedbank.se, 2011).

1.2 Purpose

Initially, our aim was to study how ethnically diverse teams build cross cultural communication competence. For this purpose we have selected an extensively ethnically diverse team, which consisted of six team members with five different ethnicities. However, during the course of this interpretative research approach, we have identified language proficiency and cross cultural adaptation as two competencies that are missing in the cross-cultural communication competence model, and these should be included.

In this thesis, we aim to understand how language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation affect ethnically diverse teams in their cross-cultural communication competence. To fulfill our aim, we investigate the importance of language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation in one team within one multinational company located in Sweden.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does language proficiency of team members affect the cross-cultural communication within the team and how do they deal with potential challenges?
2. How does the individual ability to adapt in a cross-cultural environment affect the communication within the team?

1.4 Delimitations

Our results indicated that language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation are two competencies that are important and should be included in the cross-cultural communication competence model. However, since our study was only exclusive to one team within one Swedish multinational company, we are aware that this could be a delimitation. If this study was conducted with several teams, additional competencies might have been discovered. Another delimitation could be the sample size, however because of time constraints and access to other MNCs this was the only option, we were still able to attain a clear picture of how an ethnically diverse team builds cross-cultural communication competence. We found the selected team to be suitable since it is extensively ethnically diverse team. In obtaining this information we are aware that the interviewees may not have been open, honest or explained the reasons behind their answers, this could depend on confidentiality issues or other reasons we were not aware of. However, due to this we did our best to make the interviewees at ease and allow them to be as frank and sincere as possible in their answers. To achieve this we had clear and concise questions and made clarifications whenever needed. Likewise, we asked them for more clarification whenever the responses were unclear.

1.5 Limitations

This study was limited by our inability to observe the team in action, and otherwise get to know them. Instead we were left to complete our study based only on interviews. This study may not be considered fully ‘global’ since it was conducted in Sweden even though it is an MNC, the interviewees indicated that the culture is colored by the Swedish model. How the Swedish culture influences their cross-cultural communication competence was not considered in this study. Furthermore, a limitation to this study is the fact that we were not in a position to observe the team, due to confidentiality issues. Another limitation is that the language, in this case English, was not the native language of all team members, which could have had an impact during the interviews. Whenever there was a need for clarification because of the language we have provided the interviewees with explanations.

2 Frame of Reference

2.1 Cross-Cultural Communication Competence

Gardner (1962) plays a foundational role in the history of the study of cross cultural communication competence. His essay *Cross Cultural Communication* addresses the problem of miscommunication in international development projects. He asks: *To what degree is it actually possible for an expert from one culture to communicate with, to get through to, persons of another culture? To what degree is the expert driven to attempt an authoritarian approach due to the failure of communication, rather than to a difference in opinion?* (Gardner, 1962) p. 241. His essay discusses how different “home” cultures can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations when international groups communicate. He concludes that researchers should explore the notion of “communication effectiveness” through close observation of people from different nationalities, how they interact with one another, and how well they accomplish group objectives. He suggests that researchers explore social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and studies on communication in the process. Gardner's (1962) focus on understanding communication effectiveness continues to be central to the field of cross cultural communication competence.

Members of ethnically diverse teams should have knowledge about the cultures of the people they interact with, and understand their team members’ personalities, conflict behaviors and life experiences (Triandis and Singelis, 1998). A clear understanding of the communication processes is important to develop high-performance teams (Triandis and Singelis, 1998). To obtain information from a colleague, a communicatively competent team member in an ethnically diverse team is capable of establishing an interpersonal relationship with an individual from another culture; and successfully exchange both verbal and non-verbal content (Spitzberg, 1983).

A Cross-cultural communication competence model developed by Matveev and Nelson (2004) discusses four important dimensions of cross cultural communication competence. Competence is defined as the ability to achieve an obligatory task effectively; in a multi-ethnic environment where the person is required a higher degree of cross cultural communication competence (Spitzberg, 1983). These four dimensions are: Interpersonal skills, team effectiveness, cultural uncertainty, and cultural empathy. The four dimensions are described below:

Interpersonal skills are the skills one utilizes to acknowledge differences in the communicative and interactional styles of people with different cultures. It is a way to show flexibility and resolve misunderstandings in the communication in ethnically diverse teams. Since employees interact on a daily basis with people from different cultures and nationalities, this is an important dimension in ethnically diverse team environments (Hellerstein and Neumark, 2003).

Team Effectiveness reflects critical skills, which have to do with the ability of a team member to comprehend and clearly communicate team goals, roles and norms to ethnically diverse team members. Effectiveness is about the achievement of goals that are set in intercultural context in an appropriate manner (Spitzberg, 2000).

Cultural Uncertainty is the capability of a team member to show patience in intercultural situations, as well as his/her acceptance of uncertainty because of cultural differences, it is the ability to be flexible at work with ethnically diverse team members. In relation to culturally diverse teams, cultural uncertainty is common since culturally diverse team members interact with members from countries where the level of uncertainty is different (Hofstead, 2001).

Cultural Empathy refers to the ability to understand and appreciate other team member's cultures, perspectives and communication patterns. Accept each other's work styles without non-judgmental view and relate to team members cultural perspectives (Mateev, Rao and Milter, 2001)

These four dimensions are essential in the study of cross-cultural communication competence since they are critical characteristics of cross-culturally competent team members in ethnically diverse teams (Matveev, Rao and Milter, 2001). While this model is integrative, the two competences language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation can help us understand how ethnically diverse teams employ cross-cultural communication competence in their daily interactions. Language in the model is referred to as the native language of team members, it does not include the shared language which is their main tool used to communicate. In our study we identified that the shared language played a critical role in the daily communication within ethnically diverse teams.

According to Marschan, Welch and Welch (1997), although many disciplines have proven that language proficiency is an important component in the ethnically diverse environments in MNCs, language proficiency seems to have disappeared from the research agenda, despite the fact that language proficiency issues arise in international business behavior. Marschan, Welch and Welch (1997) argue that the question of language proficiency and its' significance to the multinational company is seldom discussed in the literature. Another reason why it is important to study language proficiency is that it is a key factor that brings the multinational organization together by shaping organization processes, information exchange and the coordination of global activities (Luo and Shenkar, 2006) Also, since MNCs consist of ethnically diverse team members, language proficiency can become a barrier if not met (Luo and Shenkar, 2006).

Adaptation is vaguely mentioned by Matveev and Nelson (2004), as the willingness to accept change and risk and to exercise flexibility, however we would highlight the cross-cultural adaptation that includes environmental and behavioral adaptation of team members to the current conditions in place, to better interact with each other. Ward and Kennedy (1999) state that cross-cultural adaptation includes behavioral and environmental adjustments, where team members have to 'fit in' to the host environment and adapt their behavior accordingly. According to Ibarra (1999) cross-cultural adaptation requires new skills, behavior and ways of interaction, which can have an impact on the individual's self-concept. Henderson (2005) states that ethnically diverse teams that are multilingual face challenges that are based on language; and these challenges arise from the language diversity of multi-lingual and multi-ethnic team members who speak in mother tongues and a variety of other languages (Henderson, 2005). Adaptation is a challenge faced by ethnically diverse teams, team members must be able to adapt to the cultures and behavior to the existing one. This allows them to become a well functioning interactive team, team members ability to acknowledge and accept the new conditions. It is a tedious long process depending on the members ability to adapt, however the more a team member adapts the more likely his/her performance will add value (Brett, Behfar and Kern, 2006).

2.2 Language proficiency

According to Jandt (2010: p. 128) the definition of language is “*a set of symbols that are shared by a community to communicate meaning and experience*”. It is a noticeable communication code. We make different assumptions about words, grammar as well as the ideas and purpose for the words we choose to use. Individuals from different cultures have various assumptions about the appropriate use of language. Besides this, many cultures treat men and women differently, therefore they are taught differently how to use language and communicate non-verbally (Stewart, Cooper, Stewart and Friedley, 2003). The language we use can also endorse insider-outsider allegiances between group members. Therefore, to really hear and understand each other we need to avoid educational, racial or class privileging codes of language use, and carefully listen to the content and the intent of the message that is being communicated by another individual (Harris and Sherblom, 2010). Nonverbal communication codes are also important. These take the form of body and facial gestures, tone of voice, turn taking, use of time or habits of dress or hairstyle. Different cultures have different standard appropriateness to nonverbal expressions (Stewart, Cooper, Stewart and Friedley, 2003). Cross-cultural communication competent team members should have basic knowledge about the culture, country and the language of their team members, this facilitates the communication since members are aware of differences in the language and the way they use the language to interact (Matveev and Nelson, 2004).

The communication will be competent in intercultural context when one achieves to approach an individual in an appropriate manner according to the context and relationship. For interactional quality, the inter-actant needs to be simultaneously appropriate and effective to be able to meet the requirements of the optimal interpersonal communicator (Spitzberg, 2000). In relation to cross-cultural communication competence, language proficiency plays a role that is fundamental because it is connected to teaching and learning of effective communication that takes place between people of different nationalities (Johnson et al. 2006).

In the case of ethnically diverse teams, language becomes a barrier since translation of the symbols becomes a tedious and difficult process for the team member who might not understand the meaning of the symbols. These symbols can be sounds or gestures and can be associated with particular cultures. This can create a barrier to communication within ethnically diverse teams where the team members speak different languages and have different abilities to interpret language; even speakers of the same language can have difficulty understanding the shared communication (Chen, Geluykens, and Choi, 2006).

Differences can also occur between individuals who speak the same language. In the case of English, which is the lingua franca of many multinational companies, a strong British, or Australian accent may cause difficulties for the team members who otherwise see themselves as proficient in English (Chen et al, 2006). Since language is deeply rooted in culture, sometimes team members translate their ideas from their own native language to the new shared language and since there can be differences in the two, this can create confusion and irritation. Culture is not only the main reason for this; linguistic competence can also play a role (Geluykens and Kraft, 2003). Sapir (1927) and Whorf (1956) argue that languages reflect cultures, which therefore have an impact on the thought process. This can also suggest that the common language used by teams can sometimes have an influence on the behavior of the team members (Chen et al, 2006).

In connection to language proficiency, encoding and decoding information becomes important. Since we humans are not able to share ideas and thoughts directly, we have to put them into symbols first. Encoding where communication is put into symbols, and decoding is

the process where meaning is assigned to symbols (Jandt, 2010).

Culturally defined and learned symbol systems define how groups perceive and comprehend reality as well as how they understand things (Nicotera, Clinkscales and Walker, 2003). These symbols are important since they have a big impact on our individual cognition and mental activities, as well as the way we think, remember, learn and use language. Our culture is a big factor, which influences our social view, our knowledge of other individuals and their feelings and ideas: how we cooperate with others; improvement of our social and interpersonal skills and as well as our willingness to organize our actions with others. Hence, individuals that are socialized in diverse cultures perceive things differently, and therefore we can never really know what another person tries to communicate (Nicotera, Clinkscales and Walker, 2003).

Thus, firstly, we need to encode and send our messages according to the rules of communication based on our cultural environment at the moment. Group members need to adapt rules of communication to decode and interpret each other's messages. The encoding and decoding of the messages is a very complicated process, which means that a huge amount of interpretation can lead to misunderstandings; it can even happen between people that share cultural norms and assumptions. However, misunderstandings are possibly superior if people have different sets of cultural assumptions. A group consistent of people from diverse cultures must consider communication in a '*low-context environment*' where the communication needs to be clearer, since this group of people does not have a common understanding where less explicitly is needed. Because of these miscommunications we need to create clearly defined and conjointly arranged upon set communication guidelines, rules as well as interaction patterns to enable group communication (Harris and Sherblom, 2010). Referring to the model by Matveev and Nelson (2004) cross-cultural communication competent individuals with interpersonal skills and cultural empathy, encode and decode information from their colleagues better, since they have the ability to deeply understand and have knowledge about different cultures within the group. Additionally they have different communication and interaction styles and they are able to see and understand the world from others cultural perspectives. With cross-cultural communication competence, employees are better able to understand and be clearer in the communication with their team members (Matveev and Nelson, 2004).

2.3 Cross-cultural adaptation

According to Ward and Kennedy (1999), adaptation in cross-cultural environments is an important factor that relates to behavioral and sociocultural competence. It is the ability to "fit in". It is the ability to acquire the right cultural skills and adjust to the host environment. Adaptation is related to the amount of time the individual interacts in a new culture or environment. The individual adapts his/her behavior based on the amount of interaction one is exposed to (Ward and Kennedy, 1999). Adaptation happens over time and follows a learning curve where one acquires specific skills to the culture and environment they interact in and adjusts accordingly (Ward and Kennedy, 1999). Adaptation to cross cultural environment takes place over an extended period, where rapid improvements happen over the first few months and stay on a stabile level there after (Ward and Kennedy, 1999).

Ibarra (1999) argues that adaptation requires new skills, behaviors and ways of interaction, which can have an impact on the individual's self-concept. Some researchers such as Pedersen (1995) state that when newcomers enter a new culture, they are initially faced with a culture shock. This reaction occurs in five stages. The first stage is the "honeymoon stage", where the individual is excited about everything that is new. The second stage involves irritations with the differences in the host culture; the third stage is about increased ability to adapt to the local environment although the individual still carries some frustration for being different; in the fourth stage, the person experiences more comfort in the new environment and a feeling of

control, and then finally, in the fifth stage, the person fully adapts to the new environment and can comfortably cope in both his/her culture and the the new one. Although a full adjustment to the new environment or culture can take years (Pedersen, 1995).

Dawis and Lofquist (1984) state that individuals can adapt to changing environments to fit their needs and abilities, and this would be considered active adjustments. While they can also adjust to new situations by changing themselves and this would be considered reactive adjustment.

Both leaders and team members deal with different challenges when working within an ethnically diverse team. One strategy to deal with various challenges is adaption, members of the team need to acknowledge cultural gaps and work around them somehow. This can be achieved through adaptation of practices and attitudes and to not change the group's membership or assignments. This only works if team members are eager to acknowledge and name their cultural differences, and accept that they are responsible for figuring out how to live with various cultural differences. This method is the best way since members of the team are involved in the process and they learn from the process this way. Team members protect their differences and at the same time accept others' differences. Often it is not personal, rather cultural (Brett, Behfar and Kern, 2006).

According to Chan and Schmitt (2000), individual adaptation is a process in which the individual adjusts his/her behavior to fit the new work demands. It is common nowadays that employees work in team settings (Chen, 2005), and there is more reliance to work on project-based work where the employees often transition into teams (Feldman, 2002). This is why it is important to learn about how employees contribute to team effectiveness (Chen, 2005). Employees go through a process of adaptation when they work in a team, and the more adaptive they are, the better their performance becomes (Chen, 2005)

Murphy (1989) states that adaptation is a form of a socialization process where the employees level of adaptation is more likely to be greater when the employee is a new comer and has to adapt and learn the new work environment; on the other hand, other authors such as Chan and Schmitt (2000) argue that the employees adapt better at the end of the socialization process and create a balance between their work procedures and their behavior. Also, an adaptation process in a team includes how to communicate with team members and clients and how to work with new technologies (Chen, 2005)

3 METHODOLOGY

Since the main purpose of our study is how language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation affect ethnically diverse team communication, we have relied on an interpretative research method. The interpretive method relies on the way we look at the world around the individuals that we study. It relates to understanding human environments and experiences and originates from Weber's concept of *Verstehen*, which means a process of understanding (Van Maanen, 1979). In this study we are using interviews to learn about an ethnically diverse team within a multinational company in Sweden. Therefore, our unit of analysis is specifically this ethnically diverse team.

3.1 Data Collection

These interviews were conducted with an ethnically diverse team at Electrolux AB, in Stockholm. We found this team suitable for our study since qualitative research is more about interpretation and less about quantification (Cassel and Symon, 1994). We have conducted the interviews in an interactive manner where we have used a language that is informal and context-based to develop new theoretical propositions (Lee, 1999).

We relied on the case study research method since it is used to generate new theory (Lee, 1999). Case study research method focuses on how and why organizational processes occur. To be able to deeply understand the development of language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation in ethnically diverse teams, a case study fits our purpose. To conduct the case study, we have prepared an interview guideline based on semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured means that they had a balance between a free flowing and a directed conversation (Lee, 1999). Semi-structured interviews have a specific topic and general themes. In this structure, the interviewer follows a schedule where specific questions are asked but the interviewee can elaborate on the asked questions and also discuss related matters as they emerge.

We have chosen a team at Electrolux AB where we conducted the interviews. The team consisted of six members who had five different ethnicities. Here we provide a description of the company where this team was situated:

Electrolux AB, is a global leader in household appliances, it sells more than 40 million products to customers in more than 150 markets every year. The company also makes appliances for professional use. Some of the company's products include; refrigerators, dishwashers, vacuum cleaners and washing machines. According to Reuters, In 2010, Electrolux was the world's second largest appliances maker after Whirlpool. Some of the company's brands include Electrolux, AEG, and Eureka (Electrolux.com).

Electrolux was founded in 1918 by Axel Wenner-Gren after a merger between Swedish Electron AB and Lux AB. The company has undergone several mergers and acquisitions and therefore has grown extensively. The stocks of Electrolux are traded in the Nasdaq and OMX Nordic market. The total revenues of Electrolux exceed 100 billion Swedish crowns. Additionally, Electrolux employs over 52,000 employees worldwide. The company has a new CEO as of January 2011, Keith McLaughlin, who is its' first non-Swedish CEO, and the

headquarters of the company are located in the Stadshagen neighborhood in Stockholm, Sweden (Electrolux.com).

In our study, we looked into the code of conduct of Electrolux AB. We came to the realization that the company realizes the cultural differences of the employees and respects them. However, it states clearly that decisions regarding hiring, advancement, training, and lay-offs are not based on the individual's cultural differences but on one's competence and qualifications. The code also states that no discrimination should be applied based on personal characteristics such as ethnicity of the employees. In accordance to the code of conduct, Electrolux AB, does have a cultural diversity/cultural sensitivity training program (Electrolux.com).

The team we chose for our study works in the dish-care unit; they have been working together for one year. The team members were recruited overseas specifically to have an ethnically diverse team. They provide a diverse set of skills, competences and creative ideas.

To learn more about the company, we examined secondary sources such as the company website and the Electrolux code of conduct. We also interviewed the leader of the team who was a source that provided additional information about the dynamics in the team. Initially, we came in contact with Electrolux AB for the purpose of our study and their response was positive. The particular leader of this team expressed most interest and volunteered his team to be the subject of study.

In the following table we state the information of team members we have interviewed; their educational background and work experience, as well as some other facts that could be important for the reader to know. Because of confidentiality reasons we do not disclose the real names of the interviewees and the project they are currently working on.

Table 1. Description of the interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Nationality	Age	Background
1	Male	Swedish	29	Studied Industrial Design in Lund in an international environment; did an internship in Spain; worked in an international design firm in Copenhagen before joining Electrolux.
2	Male	Colombian	28	Studied for his bachelors in Colombia with mostly Colombians; went to Italy to study for his masters with a few international people; attended workshop with different nationalities.
3	Male	Indian	26	Electrolux is his first real job; he graduated in 2010 and wrote his thesis with General Motors in India. Studied at an international university in India where he learned how to approach different cultures.
4	Male	Brazilian	28	Never worked in a multicultural team before Electrolux. He thought this has affected him negatively when he joined this team. His university studies didn't prepare him for an international environment either because they didn't have many foreign students in the school.

5	Male	Swedish	29	He has two bachelors' degrees from a multicultural environment. Participated in a 6 month exchange program in Holland and ran his business. He had a positive experience working in a multi-ethnic environment in school.
6 (Leader)	Male	British	42	Leads this multicultural team. Has experience working with people from Italy, U.S., Denmark and South East Asia. Travels a lot and therefore appreciates different cultures.

The interview questions were directed to members of a team of six persons that were trained in industrial design and engineering. The team members' interview consisted of 23 questions and the average time for each interview was one hour. We have also interviewed the leader of the team and directed 32 questions to him to gain an understanding of the state of communication in this ethnically diverse team. This interview was also estimated to one hour where we have recorded the interviews at a conference room provided by Electrolux AB

The questions in the interviews were based on the main concepts within cross-cultural communication competence, such as interpersonal skills, team effectiveness, cultural uncertainty, cultural empathy, language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation. These concepts were included in the interviews since they play an important role in cross-cultural communication competence. All of the questions were asked as part of the semi-structured interview style and directly connected to our main focus, cross-cultural communication competence.

This research is framed around the interpretive method. This means our focus is on understanding what our research subjects are telling us from the perspective of meaning. This method comes out of the research of sociologist Max Weber and anthropologist Clifford Geertz, and has been embraced by a number of different disciplines, including organizational studies, political science, and economics (Keyes, 2002)

In this study, we interpret our interview notes and recordings. We do not only look into what is said, but how and how often things are said. We seek a deeper explore their experiences, thoughts, and feelings as they relate to cross-cultural communication.

Findings from this study are intended to provide an understanding of the cross-cultural communication competence of the selected team within Electrolux AB. In doing so, we hope to provide insight to other ethnically diverse teams in Sweden and their organizations. While the specific circumstances at the Electrolux AB team are unique, the challenges they face to achieve and maintain cross-cultural communication competence may be generalized (Lee, 1999).

3.2 Data Analysis

To analyze the data generated from the interviews, we used a thematic method inspired by Boyatzis (1998). In the analysis, words or phrases are used as "codes" to analyze data in themes. The steps that we have followed in the data analysis are described below:

- Write in extenso: we wrote down each interview in a word document.
- Categorize words and phrases: We used excel spreadsheets and wrote categories we found from the interviews such as culture or language
- We wrote quotes from each interviewee related to the categories that were found.

- After reducing the raw material, we have compared the found themes across all the interviews.
- We developed a document where all the found themes and matching statements were included.
- We also analyzed the findings and determined the differentiation between the themes.
- We have gone back to the raw information and counted the number of times language proficiency and adaptation were mentioned.
- We created a table with the number of times language proficiency and adaptation were mentioned in the raw information.

3.3 Credibility

Credibility is the degree to which the researcher finds legitimacy of the study and emphasizes that the discoveries make sense. For this triangulation of data can be applied to the study, meaning different individuals conduct the same study (Finlay, 2009). To ensure that our research possesses credibility, we made sure that we have used a technique suitable for our type of study; interviews. We believe that our interviews were accurate, since they were conducted by two researchers. This means that both of us have recorded, transcribed and analyzed the data together. We have recorded the statements from the interviews and asked to clarify questions when needed. We supported our analysis with correct data generated from the interviews; and interpreted the data very carefully. The theories that we have used were solid and found in legitimate journals and books. Therefore, we are confident that they are well studied by other researchers as well. Other concepts and conclusions generated in this document are also supported by theory and findings. In addition, credibility is achieved through providing an audit trail of supplementing documents, therefore, interview guidelines are provided in the appendix of this report.

Below we provide a table that shows the number of times the words language and adaptation appeared in the interviews. We have listed the numbers of the interviews and then number of times each interviewee mentioned the two competencies. Finally, we have included a cumulative total at the bottom of the table.

Table 2. The appearance of language and adaptation in the interviews

Interviewees	Language	Adaptation
1	7	4
2	5	3
3	13	8
4	9	4
5	7	7
6	11	9

Total	52	35
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4. Analysis

During the analysis we identified two main themes language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation that add on to the model of cross-cultural communication competence developed by Matveev and Nelson (2004). For each theme we identified specific characteristics and different aspects based on what the interviewees said during the interviews. Because of confidentiality, we have not disclosed the names of the interviewees; instead we have used numbers.

4.1 Language proficiency

According to the analysis language proficiency is an important competence that should be considered in the cross-cultural communication competence model. All team members highlighted the importance of this dimension during the interviews. Language is a valuable tool that can facilitate the interaction in communication specifically in an ethnically diverse team, which by nature is multilingual. Without a shared language team members will not be in a position to communicate and work on common projects. According to Chen, Geluykern and Choi (2003) in the case of ethnically diverse teams, language can create complications since different team members have different abilities or ways to interpret and understand the shared language. This creates a communication gap within ethnically diverse teams (Chen, Geluykern and Choi, 2003)

Based on our analysis we strongly believe that language proficiency is a significant factor in ethnically diverse teams' competence building because even if we have an ethnically diverse team with a wide range of experiences and competences working with various cultures, they will not be able to leverage on their expertise if they do not have a shared language to rely on. One team member stated: *Ideas do not come across because they are not phrased well, and therefore no one can understand what you mean. This is because of the level of English in the team.*

Table 3. Quotations on language proficiency

Interviews	Quotations
Interview 1	<p>The language we communicate with has an impact; communication suffers sometimes because of the language we use. The language of communication in our team affects individual's confidence when they present an idea, because of the proficiency level of English in the team. We sometimes struggle with communicating across our ideas because of lack of confidence, since we do not phrase words right and have hard time finding the right words.</p> <p>When I start working with new people from another culture, I start from square one because you do not know how the communication is going to proceed. I am very articulate and careful with the language in the beginning; firstly I see what is easy for them to understand. I always try to speak in an easy way to make sure they understand me.</p>
Interview 2	<p>The level of language is important if you want to understand and interact with team members, however some people in the team do not have the same proficiency level of the shared language and this can create challenges, for them to express themselves and for the rest to understand them. All team members are male, hence we have a 'masculine' language that we use in the team, our jokes are very masculine and if a woman</p>

	would enter we would have to change that. All team members have learned some kind of international English, but our leader is a native English speaker, this creates problems for us to understand him because of his different accent and pronunciation, we have to often ask him to repeat what he said. We also repeat ourselves sometimes because of our own accents and pronunciations that others do not understand. We sometimes say things that do not make sense or use the wrong word, and then it's harder to follow and understand each other.
Interview 3	All team members use various approaches to communicate because we use different gestures, think differently and have different accents. Because of the proficiency level in the shared language communication gaps occur. But it is important for us to have a good communication since we work with projects together, all of us are responsible to share information and make sure they understand, however the leader is the main person to share information for everyone. It is not a monologue it is a dialogue, and everyone involved is equally responsible.
Interview 4	I do not have big problems when working with different cultures, I have bigger problems with the shared language that we use to communicate within the team, and this is because of my accent mostly. I often need to explain myself because of this, since team members do not understand what I'm trying to communicate. For instance in my home country, we use many hand-gestures when we communicate, here they do not, I also had to learn what different gestures and signs used here meant, such as yes (ahh) is frequently used here and that was really weird for me in the beginning. Another person that often needs to repeat himself in the team is the leader because of his accent we have difficulties to understand him. Because of these language issues we have confusion and misunderstandings in our team. I think the main problem is the accents and different languages that we use.
Interview 5	Our shared language can be an obstacle for us sometimes, so I feel that it is easier to communicate with native speaking people, because in these situations, it is easier to communicate across exactly what you meant, there are no communication gaps because of the shared language in this situation. The shared language we use today is tricky, because this forces us to think more of what and how we say things, since it is not as natural as our native language. When you do not use your native language to communicate, sometimes it's harder to understand and make yourself understood. English, our shared language has a big impact on our communication, since we are limited to express ourselves sometimes.
Interview 6 - Leader	The differences in American English and British English affect the communication within the team, this creates problems sometimes. For me English is my mother tongue so it is not a problem, but for others the shared language creates problems, because they do not have English as their first language. I see that team members really try hard to speak good proper English, this makes it harder for them to put something on the table in a smooth way, and they cannot push their ideas forward if they cannot communicate it through. Obviously there are different proficiency levels and we cannot allow it to become an issue. I try to be very informal and not make them feel uncomfortable because of their level of the shared language.

4.2 Cross-cultural adaptation

As was the case of language proficiency, we noticed that change and acceptance of the new culture was significant for all team members and for the company. Without this change and acceptance they would not be able to successfully interact. Their changed behavior was also an important factor in the cross-cultural adaptation. According Ibarra (1999), when individuals go through the process of adaptation their behaviors change, which leads to improved interaction within the team, this change requires new skills for the person. Additionally this creates a change in the person as a whole (Ibarra, 1999). In the analysis it was clear that all team members had to change at least some of their behavior that was based on their culture in order to interact successfully in the new culture and environment. Team members worked hard with the transition to the new environment and culture, which required them to learn new skills and leave behind some inappropriate skills associated with their old culture. One team member said: *I cannot completely be myself, I had to change the way I behaved; for instance my sense of humor had to be changed because it was too distinct.* The adaptation of an individual means their behavior changes to fit the new work requirements (Chan, 2000). Adaptation is one's ability to assimilate to the host environment while the persons accurately develops cultural skills (Ward and Kennedy, 1999). One team member said: *There is no other way but accepting and learning the way things work here. We have to accept and adapt to things that are unusual for us in our cultures.*

Table 4. Quotations on cross-cultural adaptation

Team interviews	Quotations
Interview 1	There is no other way in this team but to adapt to the environment. It is the only acceptable way. As a team member you have to adjust especially when you are new, and as you build adaptation, you also build confidence. New team members become “louder” and communicate better the longer they stay in the team.
Interview 2	We talk a lot about differences, for example about how different things work in our countries, however we all manage to adapt. We are aware of the fact that we are in a foreign country and therefore have to assimilate. I learn the Swedish language so I don't feel like an outsider. Some of us adapt more than the other, but the one that adapts the most needs to help others in the adaptation process. I try to integrate into the new culture.
Interview 3	One thing that I have adjusted is my sense of humor and time management. I can't be myself because of the dynamics of the team. We have accepted the fact that we are all different and it is something we have to deal with. I try to accept the culture and the people and participate in activities to get to know the culture.
Interview 4	It is important to be adaptable and since I come from a country that is different, I have to understand and accept this culture and deal with it. I understand that I can't make the same jokes here that I did in my country, therefore I have adjusted my behavior. I usually try to adapt myself especially when it comes to communication. For example, I don't use the same gestures since they are perceived differently here. I compare my country to the current system all the time, but I have to adapt to the current one.
Interview 5	I am flexible and have adapted myself in the sense that I avoid using irony, therefore I have adjusted my language and the use of words. I take others' cultures into consideration. I adapt to logic and critical thinking.
Interview 6	Adaptation to the organizational culture is important, since they all have different national cultures. They have to adapt to the culture that is present here a “Glocal culture”; and keep their local cultures to themselves. The expectation is to adapt to the organizational culture for example in terms of time management, organizational hierarchy and decision-making authority. The culture of this company is the norm. Team members have to adjust their culture to the office environment.

Electrolux AB has a code of conduct that states the company's commitment to diversity. For

the team that we have studied, it was apparent that they were all hired based on their skills and qualifications but also for the diversity of their backgrounds. They stated that they didn't have any training in diversity management but that the company respected and valued their differences. Also, both the team members and the leader mentioned that they were required and encouraged to apply the company culture and prioritize it to their own individual cultures. The code of conduct also emphasized that all employees should be treated equally in disregard to their ethnicity and that discriminatory treatment should not be applied. Also it appeared that the team members did not have diversity training and neither did the leader in diversity management (Electrolux.com).

4.3 Language proficiency as a cross-cultural communication competence

We noticed in our analysis that the biggest challenge did not have to do with their team members' language. Instead the challenge lay on team member's language proficiency. By this we refer to the shared language used within the team, which in this case is English. The main barriers for this team lie in the shared language, this new common language imposes a new set of challenges for the team members that are not considered in the model by Matveev and Nelson (2004). Based on these challenges, we have identified four important elements that should be part of the newly added dimension of language proficiency. With language proficiency we mean team members ability to understand the shared language based on different criteria's mentioned by team members. These elements should be considered in the communication within ethnically diverse teams:

Table 5. Language proficiency

Language Proficiency

- The ability to understand and use the shared language
- The ability to take into account accents and pronunciations
- The ability to manage your gestures, irony, jokes and non-verbal language to fit into the shared language
- The ability to use creative ways to communicate

The first element is the ability to understand and use the shared language. Here we refer to the proficiency level in the shared language. The whole team agreed that the language of communication was the biggest challenge facing them in communication. The main barriers to language were accents and different pronunciations. In our analysis we found that various

challenges occur in relation to the level of language proficiency. Team members in the analysis indicated that confusions often occurs because of the lack of proficiency in the shared language; it also creates limitations since those members of the team who are not as proficient in the language have a lower level of vocabulary; therefore they often used words inappropriately, and sometimes lack words they need to make their thoughts clearly understood. Many times, ethnically diverse teams have a shared language in the team that is not the native language of most team members Chen, Geluyjens and choi (2006); this creates a challenge were the course of communication does not flow well (Marschan et al, 1997). In the case of this team the shared language is not the native language of any of the team members, though English was the native language of the leader it still created a problem for the other team members. Here we note that this problem appears as long as the language of communication is not the native language for all team members. Here is what two team members said:

Citation 1: English has an impact on our communication, we often have to repeat ourselves to make sure others understand, because sometimes we say things that do not make sense or use the wrong word, and then its harder to follow and understand each other.

Citation 2: The language we have is tricky; we have to think more of what and how we say things to make ourselves understood, since English is not as natural as our native language. English has an impact on our communication; it's a limited way to express yourself sometimes and this goes for everyone in the team.

Because of language challenges, team members had difficulties to express themselves, which resulted in low self-confidence in communicating their ideas. On the team level this impacts the flow of information and the effectiveness of teamwork. To allow teams in MNCs to perform their tasks effectively, there is a need to look at their communication processes through language (Marschan, Welch, and Welch, 1997). One team member stated: *Ideas do not come across since they are not phrased well, this is because of the level of English, and therefore our communication suffers sometimes.*

We identified in the analysis that the proficiency level of language had a correlation with the team member's education level and experience working in ethnically diverse environments prior to joining the team. To overcome this challenge some of the strategies used by this team included: the use of simple and clear words; by showing flexibility and patience to each other; to give each other feedback; and most importantly to repeat themselves often. Here is what one team member said: *We know international English, and now we work with a native speaking person (the leader), which means that we often have to repeat ourselves.*

The second element is *the ability to take into account accents and pronunciations*. Accents and pronunciations can be different depending on the country or the region one comes from, the way you say individual words and how clearly one pronounces has major impact on communication within an ethnically diverse team (Chen, Geluykens, and Choi, 2006). There are many types of diversity in teams and one of them is the fact that teams consist of individuals from different ethnicities who therefore speak different languages (Chen, et al 2006). This can create a problem; and in fact one of the main challenges to communication is accents (Chen, Geluykens and Choi, 2006). According to the analysis, accents and pronunciations often lead to misunderstandings between team members, they had difficulties encoding and decoding information because they did not understand each other's accents and pronunciations. Two team members stated:

Citation 1: Because of the different accents and pronunciations in the group, we have to repeat ourselves often. Especially my leader's accent is hard to understand sometimes, we

often ask him to repeat what he said.

Citation 2: Because of the accents and different pronunciations it's hard to understand each other sometimes, so we ask each other to repeat.

One important factor with great impact in this process was the cultural background of team members. Their differences in culture meant that they heard and understood words in different ways. The common language of the team can create difficulties such as language structure and differences in accent and pronunciation of different words, which can lead to misunderstandings and irritations (Chen et al, 2006). An additional factor with great impact we found in the analysis was that time played a role. As time went by, they became more knowledgeable about each other's ways of interacting; and fewer issues with accents and pronunciations occurred. On the individual level, team members gained more awareness about their own and others' accents and pronunciations. A reason for this could be that they no longer were as reserved and dared more; they could communicate with more ease as they became more comfortable with each other. As two team members stated during the interviews:

Citation 1: You can see that people that work here, in the beginning are very quite but with time they become more confident and louder. I have noticed that people have been more quite and passive, however when they start to get to know each other and how other people are, they become themselves.

Citation 2: I think for me accents and different pronunciations could lead to misunderstandings, I have had some confusion in the past because of these language problems.

It was obvious that the leader's accent was the hardest to understand, and team members had to ask for explanation repeatedly, this was because he was a native English speaker and the rest of the team had International English as their second language. The leader was aware of the fact that being an English native speaker created a problem for the rest of the team to clearly understand him. In reference to the team members he acknowledged that since English was not their native language, this created a problem for them to present themselves with their ideas. Therefore, he was easygoing and flexible with their pronunciation, accents and use of language to make them at ease. As one team member talked about the leader's accent he said: *My leader's accent is hard to understand sometimes, so he has to repeat what he said. This language problem leads to confusion and misunderstandings.*

The third element is the ability to manage one's gestures, irony, jokes and non-verbal language to fit into the shared language. Language that is based on these factors can be sensitive within ethnically diverse teams; therefore it's important to not use this kind of language. According to Stewart, Cooper, Stewart and Friedly (2003), team members with various cultures have different approaches to the use of language. In an ethnically diverse team, there will be many various approaches used in the communication, hence members of the team should be aware of each other's differences. Language is an important communication code that should be considered in an ethnically diverse team, team members must be able to use the language in an appropriate and effective manner according to the current environment they are in (Stewart, Cooper, Stewart and Friedly, 2003). As mentioned previously in the model developed by Matveev and Nelson (2004) they do not consider the shared language used by team members to communicate, hence they did not consider how important it is for team members to use language in an appropriate manner according to the

environment. In the analysis the team has indicated that they avoid the use of irony since it can be perceived differently in different cultures. One team member stated: *I often skip irony and other similar things to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations, things that may not be understood in the same way for other cultures.*

The same applies to jokes that were used by team members, since they can be offensive depending on how provocative they are. Another team member mentioned jokes and how he handles them: *I come from a happy country and we make jokes all the time, and here in Sweden, I know that I cannot make some kind of jokes, I cannot joke all the time as I used to do in my country, the Swedish people are more serious and more focused.*

A non-verbal language was gestures. Some team members mentioned that they used gestures frequently in their home country, however when they joined this team, they avoided the use of gestures since gestures are not often used here and can also be perceived differently. One of the team members said: *Some gestures and signs here in Sweden are different which we do not have in my home country, so I try to learn what these mean. For instance Swedish people often say (ahh) when they mean yes, this I did not understand in the beginning and it was weird for me.*

Language has a strong impact on communication in intercultural settings (Jandt, 2010), Researchers such as Sapir (1958) and Whorf (1956), state that languages effect the way we think, and the way we think is influenced by our culture; which may lead to individuals misunderstanding things because they associate them with other things in their culture. In other respects, according to the analysis this team avoids the use of language that could offend other team members. According to the analysis this was important for them to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings, team members understood that their way of using language was different from the one in the current environment. This meant that they had to avoid parts of their language that they used to communicate in their country; they realized that what was usual in their culture and language did not apply in this case. The interesting part is that all of them realized these differences in their cultures and use of language; therefore they started to avoid that in the way they communicate with each other here. Team members need to be able to affectively and appropriately communicate with different nationalities this is important when team members build cross-cultural communication competence. Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006).

The last element in the dimension is *the ability to use creative ways to communicate.* This ability is important in situations where the team consists of various ethnicities, where the language of communication is not the native language of team members. In the analysis we noticed that because of this, the conventional way to communicate was not the suitable option. One of the team members stated: *We do not work with words all day, we try to create pictures and visuals to understand each other, and this is a unique way of communicating.*

Because of their language problems they were required to find a common way to communicate and to leverage their knowledge and become a well-functioning interactive team. Since they all have background in design, they established a special way for them to communicate through pictures and visuals. This has eliminated many barriers they were faced with in the communication. This method has been useful for this team, however we do not propose that all teams use pictures and visuals. Other teams can create their own solutions to their communication gaps, based on their needs, education and previous experiences. Two of the team members talked about their way of communicating:

Citation 1: *We use pictures and visuals to avoid misunderstandings. It is key that ideas come forward; somebody needs to understand what you mean.*

Citation 2: *Because we all have design backgrounds we use pictures to communicate, a picture is quite easy to understand and communicate with, it's a good way to present your idea and make yourself clearly understood.*

Creativity has been essential for this team, since it provides a solution that did not require the same language proficiency. Now, they were able to present their ideas and move them forward since others understood them easily. Members within ethnically diverse teams must apply communication in a “*low context environment*” where they need to be more explicit since they lack a common understanding. Therefore there is a need for the creation of common guidelines, rules and interaction patterns to allow well-functioning team communication (Harris and Sherblom, 2010). As one team member said during the interview: *We use a lot of pictures and visuals to communicate with, because it's easier for us to present ideas and for others to understand them. Strong communication is very important, if others understand your idea, then the idea moves forward.*

4.4 Cross-cultural adaptation as a cross-cultural communication competence

We noticed in the analysis a second new competence that team members needed to possess to build cross-cultural communication competence, which was cross-cultural adaptation. With cross-cultural adaptation we refer to team members' ability and willingness to change to the current environment and its requirements: to accept cultural differences and change their behavior if needed. Both the leader and team members mentioned that they had to change, accept and adapt a lot in the beginning, referring to the culture, environment and behavior. They felt that they needed to change the way they worked before, hence change the way they communicate.

Team members understood that the way they communicated at home was not the correct way in the new environment. They had to accept the current culture and change their behavior into how things work in the new company. The most important changes according to the leader were decision-making authority and time-management, this meant that team members changed their behavior; they had to make their own decisions and come on time. On the contrary according to team members, the biggest change was to accept and adapt to the new culture. According to Matveev and Nelsons (2004) model, team members need to be aware of cultural differences, however according to our analysis team members need to accept cultural differences, it goes beyond acknowledgement they had to change to fit the new culture. We identified in our analysis that cultural acceptance in this case refers to the culture of the company not each other's cultures. To be open and aware of the company culture is not enough, instead they have to accept and work according to company norms to avoid negative consequences in their relationships and the communication. This meant that they had to adopt new behavior that is appropriate in the new environment.

Pedersen (1995) and Barna (2009) also mention cultural acceptance, they describe it with five phases: honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment, mastery and the interdependence. It is

unavoidable to entirely circumvent culture shock when individuals come to a foreign culture. The first phase is when persons see the differences from the old and new culture in a romantic light. The second phase is when they feel that unfavorable events are strange and offensive to one's cultural attitude. Language barriers may intensify the sense of disengagement from the surroundings. The adjustment phase, happens usually after six to twelve months, individuals are more comfortable and know more about the new culture and routines, they start to grow problem-solving skills when they deal with the new culture and accept the way things work. The fourth phase is when individuals are able to participate fully and comfortably in the host culture, however they still keep some traits from their cultures such as accents and language. The last phase is when the individual is fully adapted to the new environment. (Pedersen, 1995 and Barna, 2009). Table 6, shows the elements that belong to cross-cultural adaptation.

Table 6. Cross-cultural adaptation

Cross-Cultural Adaptation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to change to the environment and its requirements • The ability to change ones behavior • Acceptance of cultural differences

The first element in this dimension is the ability to change to the environment and its requirements. Here we refer to the individual's abilities to change the way they worked and apply to the new environment and its requirements. All team members and the leader argued that all have to accept, adapt, adjust, and melt into the ways things work here, there is no other way. All of them mentioned that they often compare how things work in their countries, however in the end they all adapt somehow, some more than the others. This is connected to the first phase according Pedersen (1995) and Barna (2009), when individuals see and compare the differences between the old and the new culture. Ward and Kennedy (1999) argue that adaptation is an important factor in cross-cultural environments, which relates to behavioral and sociocultural competence. It requires the capability to adapt to the current state and obtain the accurate cultural abilities and assimilate to the host environment (Ward and Kennedy, 1999). Two team members stated:

Citation 1: I'm not myself; I had to change a lot. I had to adapt to this culture, dynamics, use of language and humor and as well learn how to come on time, since time management is not important in my culture.

Citation 2: We all are different and talk a lot how things work in our countries, but somehow we all adapt to the culture here.

According to the leader the team had to adapt to the global company environment, two specific things he mentioned included time management and decision making authority, these were the two main issues team members had to adapt to. He acknowledges their different backgrounds and cultures, however he expects all to have a 'glocal' culture when they come to work. He said *The Swedish model is the norm in this company and some things are just not acceptable such as coming late or not allowing other team members to speak their mind because of their position. They all are expected to accept the "glocal" culture here.*

We would like to emphasize the importance of team members' adaptation to the new environment and its requirements. Murphey (1989) states that adaptation is a form of

socialization process where the adaption level of the employee is greater when he/she is a newcomer and is required to learn the new work conditions. On the contrary Chan and Schmitt (2000) argue that employees adapt better once they have created a balance between their behavior and work processes. We refer to all team members ability to change to the new common ways of work in the company, and have a successful interaction, Matveev and Nelson (2004) mentions this however they refer to this as the ability to appreciate and accept each others different ways of doing things. Once again we go beyond this; team members need to accept and change to the company ways, they do not consider each other's work ways. One team member stated: *I need to change all the time, the Swedish culture in the company is different from my own, I have to get into this culture and adapt to the current system.*

The second element is about the ability to change one's behavior. In our analysis with a high degree of cultural diversity we found that status differences are important and affect the team, hence they were required to adapt their behavior in regard to status differences (decision-making) and the way they interacted around their leader, one team member mentioned: *I mostly have noticed how people show respect for authorities, for instance the manager is perceived as bigger in some other cultures than the Swedish.* In the words of the leader referring to this: *We had some challenges with empowerment, where some people saw me as the only decision maker, it took a while for them to dare to come up with their own opinions and make their own decisions.* Matveev and Nelson (2004) refer to behavior skills as following: empathy, human warmth, charisma and the ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty. Additionally they argue that a study that examines other issues such as degree of cultural diversity and status differences should be conducted in connection to the complex communicative behavior in ethnically diverse teams. According to Ward and Kenedy (1999), an individual's adaptation happens over an extended period of time based on the amount of interaction one is exposed to. The most significant period of adaptation occurs in the beginning of the process, where the individual obtains the required skills to fit in the host environment (Ward and Kennedy, 1999). One team member stated: *In the beginning, people are quiet passive but after a while they see and learn how people work here, and try to accept and change into the existing way.*

Although the model by Matveev and Nelson (2004) takes into account many abilities team members need to have, the model does not consider the importance of changing behavior. The model considers the importance to establish an interpersonal relationship with individuals of other cultures by effective exchange in verbal and non-verbal levels of behavior, and the ability to exercise flexibility. In the analysis we identified, that team members had to change their behavior accordingly, and they were all willing to do this more or less. The cross-cultural communication competence model mentions the importance to adapt flexibility into work, in the analysis we identified that team members were required to change, therefore we have added the ability to change ones behavior to the company ways. In this case team members had no option but to change, it was not a matter of choice. We also noted in the analysis that they had to change their behavior according to the accepted way in the company. They did not practice flexibility to each other's ways of working; instead all of the team members applied the company accepted behavior. As one team member mentioned: *I'm aware of that the country and the company are different here so I cannot always act as I usually act in my home country, this applies to all situations as well as communication. And this goes for all of us.*

Additionally, another team member stated: *I always try to change myself in a good way and we always talk about differences, I notice that things work differently here and I usually say*

that this does not happen in my country, however I know that I have to change to the company norms. In this case the team members behavior changed along the process of socialization, as the leader of the team pointed that members of the team had to adapt to time management and decision-making hierarchy works here. Change in their decision-making capability led to more discussions and interaction, therefore more ideas and solutions were generated. One team member said: *I usually try to adapt myself especially when it comes to communication.* We clearly noticed that showing patience to cultural differences and being flexible according to Matveev and Nelsons (2004) model, did not apply in this case. Since we perceived it as they were completely expected and required to adapt and change their behavior to fit the team and organizational ways. In this case, the team and the organization did not take into account their cultural dynamics. Hence we would like to add the ability to adapt ones behavior to the new work ways, we also want to emphasize this since according to Brett, Behfar and Kern (2006) it is important with individual adaptation of attitudes and practices to not change the groups assignments. Adaptation is also strongly linked to the ability to change ones behavior accordingly (Anawati and Craig, 2006). In the decision-making process team members became more confident in speaking up through the exercise of adaptation. Empowerment in decision-making allowed team members to create more dynamic communication. When they felt empowered, team members changed and were more likely to voice their ideas and solutions.

Another behavior that was changed by team members was the use of language, which is different in various cultures. We are taught differently how to use language and how to communicate non-verbally (Stewart and Cooper, Stewart and friedley, 2003). Language use was an additional behavior that had to change by all team members since their humor, irony, hand-gestures, tone of voice and face-gestures were different. These behaviors could easily lead to misunderstandings and were sometimes inappropriate in the host environment. Two team member stated:

Citation 1: *Non-verbal gestures are different here compared to my country; people do not use a lot of gestures here so I need to be adaptable all the time.*

Citation 2: *There is no other way but accepting and adapting to the way it works here. I adapt better ways of communicating.*

The third element is acceptance of ‘glocal’ culture. This element refers to the differences in the company culture and their own individual cultures. The analysis showed that team members are open to cultural differences, which is important according to Matveev and Nelson (2004). Team members have a basic understanding of each other’s cultural differences but do not see the world from each other’s cultural perspective as Matveev and Nelson (2004) recommend. In the case of this team their understanding and acknowledgement of each other’s cultures was the limit. However, in relation to the company culture, team members went beyond understanding and acknowledgment. They experienced cultural shocks in the beginning, but with time they overcame this when they saw and learned what is accepted and appropriate in this culture. Pedersen (1995) and Barna (2009) mention how individuals typically in the adjustment phase are more comfortable and know more about the new culture and routines, they accept the way things work in the new culture. This was the case for the team we studied, they all realized that they needed to accept the way things work here, they got more comfortable as they got to know the people and culture in place. Two members talked about this change:

Citation 1: *In the beginning I was in a cultural shock phase, I had to learn and accept the culture and the people here.*

Citation 2: *It's important to understand and accept different cultures, its important to get to know the new culture. I try to get the feeling and what is happening around med and I try to absorb the culture.*

We agree that all team members understood the importance to accept change and be flexible in certain situations. They are very aware of the differences in their culture and the current one in the organizations, therefore they are open to cultural differences. According to Matveev and Nelson (2004), these abilities are important to develop cross-cultural communication competence. According to Chan (2000) individuals in teams need to change their behavior and adapt to the culture. One team member explained this: *There is no other way but accepting and adapting to the way things work here, we adjust/melt into the company culture*

Based on the analysis, we argue that acknowledgment of each individuals culture is not the only important factor team members should consider, furthermore they need to change and adapt different behaviors that they bring with them from their own culture, which may not be accepted or appropriate here. It was not so much about showing patience and acceptance of each other's different behaviors and cultures, it was more about their own responsibility to act in an appropriate manner and accept the new culture. Team members were left with the responsibility to adapt to the 'glocal' culture in disregard of their own national cultures; no exceptions were made for any of the team members. Ethnically diverse teams usually have to consider their communication in a "low context environment", which according to Harris and Sherblom (2010) requires team members to have a higher degree of cross-cultural communication competence, they need to be more clear to achieve a common understanding. When team members adapted to the "glocal" culture, they did not need to consider their communication in a "low context environment" as much. In this state they have developed a common understanding, which contributes to less misunderstandings and confusions. They did not have to provide as defined explanations as before.

Leader stated: *It is natural to have people from all over the world. Once the team members come to the company, they get the company culture applied to them. They should take on the "glocal" culture.*

In the words of a team member: *The organizational culture never changes for someone new, we have to change to the culture and the dynamics here.*

The model by Matveev and Nelson (2004) is beneficial. Nevertheless with the additional competences, we believe it would be more complete, since it includes some other important aspects that have been neglected. These aspects may contribute to the quality of communication, since they have an affect on the individual's ability to communicate their ideas and opinions accurately and effectively.

4.5 Elaboration on the themes as competences

To further the analysis we elaborate on the themes as competencies that add on the cross-cultural communication competence model and connect it to literature.

This new model represents the four original competencies from the model developed by Matveev and Nelson (2004). In addition we have added the identified competences, language

proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation. As we explain, language proficiency has an effect on all competences and therefore it is placed as a main factor in this new model. Cross-cultural adaptation is one competency that is as important as the rest of the competencies that needs to be built by ethnically diverse team members to build cross-cultural communication competence. The remaining competencies carry the same amount of weight, they are equally important and therefore they should not be listed in any order.

Table 7. The extended model of cross-cultural communication competence

4.5.1 Language proficiency

Our analysis indicated that language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation are two fundamental competencies that should be included in the cross-cultural communication competence model. Language proficiency can either further or hinder the communication within the team. Language provides team members with the ability to communicate ideas and opinions. Therefore, difficulty in understanding the shared language creates a barrier to communication. Chen, Geluykens, and Choi (2006) argue, since ethnically diverse teams are multilingual, the team members' interpretation of the communication is done in various ways. This applies to all members of an ethnically diverse team (Chen, Geluykens, and Choi, 2006). Without proficiency in the common language, team members are not in a position to communicate and therefore build other important competencies. Team members will not be able to acknowledge different communication styles, understand the teams' goals, or deal with misunderstandings. According to Chen, Geluykens, and Choi (2003) when members of an ethnically diverse team do not have the same language proficiency, communication barriers may occur, since translation of the information can become a complicated process that can hinder communication. This is because team member's language proficiency allows them to communicate to a certain extent (Chen, Geluykens, and Choi, 2003). These consequences can have a negative effect on the team as a whole. It also appeared in our analysis, that when team members are not confident in their proficiency in the shared language, they are not able to communicate their knowledge and expertise. This can be detrimental to a team that wants to leverage on its' diversity and therefore recruits employees who are ethnically diverse. Essentially, if the requirements of language proficiency are not met, there will be no use of having an ethnically diverse team, since team members would not be able to efficiently understand each other to achieve work objectives. The key reason to create ethnically diverse teams is to leverage on their knowledge and skills, Chen, Geluykens, and Choi (2006) and on the contrary the central issue for ethnically diverse teams that fail is cross-cultural communication (Gardner, 1962).

For effective communication within ethnically diverse teams, individuals must be able to interchange communication at both verbal and non-verbal language (Spitzberg, 1983). To attempt to build other competencies that are included in the model we have modified, language is a prerequisite for building a complete cross-cultural communication competence. To develop other competencies we first need to be able to understand each other and make ourselves understood, and therefore understanding begins with language. Without overcoming this language challenge team members cannot build any other competence that are included in the model. According to Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006) language proficiency plays a critical role for effective transfer of communication in an ethnically diverse team.

With a common language we can develop common goals, be able to give and receive constructive feedback, and solve conflicts and problems. Unnecessary misunderstandings may occur because of lack in language proficiency. Ethnically diverse teams consist of many different cultures, which can affect their communication. Because of culture, team members have different abilities to interpret language, this also applies to team members who come from the same country, difficulties in understanding the shared language can occur in this situation as well (Chen, Geluykens, and Choi, 2003). Fundamentally, we emphasize that language proficiency competence should be considered in ethnically diverse teams.

4.5.2 Cross-cultural adaptation

We argue that cross-cultural adaptation is important and should be included in the cross-cultural communication competence model since it is of the essence for team members to adjust according to the new culture to be able to meet new work requirements (Chan and Schmitt, 2000). The cross-cultural communication competence model does not take into consideration the role adaptation plays in the work of ethnically diverse teams who come from different cultural backgrounds and therefore have many different kinds of behavior. We want to stress the importance to change one's behavior to the 'glocal' culture instead of the ability to work in a flexible manner as Matveev and Nelson (2004) highlight. Adapting to one common culture allows the team members to find a shared culture that they can all apply. This allows team members to have a common understanding, which facilitates their communication; they do not have to be as explicit once the change to the 'glocal' culture occurs. Cross-cultural adaptation is another competency that we have identified as fundamental in the dynamics of ethnically diverse teams. It is the ability to develop new cultural abilities that are in line with the new environment. Adaptation is a gradual process where the individual conforms to new ways in accordance with the host environment (Ward and Kennedy, 1999).

In our analysis, it was revealed that team members were required to adapt to the team culture in disregard of certain aspects of their own national cultures. Which have resulted in positive results were most of them were able to adjust their communication styles, non-verbal language and other behaviors accordingly. Without adapting to the local environment and culture, individuals will not be in a position to influence their situation in the new settings (Chen 2005). With adaptation employees feel more comfortable in the new culture and environment, hence they take more initiatives and are more confident in communication within the team. They are more at ease when they express themselves and communicate their thoughts. This makes them more effective team members since they are in a position to initiate discussion and solve problems.

Cross-cultural adaptation is important for team members. It is a process that simplifies the whole experience of the team member and allows communication and interaction to flow smoothly. It is the ability to apply the right culture in the right environment; and therefore it is important to accept and change to the common culture since it provides a roadmap of how things should be done. The ability to acquire the appropriate culture and apply to the host environment is an essential competence ethnically diverse team members need to develop (Ward and Kennedy, 1999). They acquire basic knowledge about the country and company culture, which is important to develop interpersonal skills according to Matveev and Nelson (2004), however they refer to this as the team members country and culture. Once team members adapt they do not have to consider each other's differences as much, since they have developed a similar cultures and their ways of interacting have become alike.

Since they all work in the same environment and culture they need to find a common ground, they all need to learn and change their behavior according to the new culture and environment. They cannot continue to apply their cultural customs in order for them to have a successful communication at work. This is necessary since all team members come from such diverse cultures and ways of communicating, it would be difficult to consider all parts of their cultures and try to integrate in the everyday work. Brett, Behfar and Kern, (2006) argue; to

deal with different challenges when working in ethnically diverse teams, individuals can apply adaption. Therefore, team members need to adopt practices and attitudes to avoid change in the group assignments (Brett, Behfar and Kern, 2006). Team members were expected to change their behavior according to the host environment and culture and this was one's responsibility. They were aware of this fact and had a reactive adjustment, according to Dawis and Lofquist (1984) when team members take the responsibility to change themselves, they refer to this as reactive adjustment. The more team members changed, the more their communication improved.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to learn how ethnically diverse teams build *language proficiency* and *cross-cultural adaptation* as part of their cross-cultural communication competence. We have decided to look into this area of study since it has been lacking in the Swedish context and there is a need for further research on this subject. To accomplish this we have applied our research to an ethnically diverse team of six team members with five different ethnicities in an MNC in Sweden. For our research purpose we have employed deeper theoretical expertise in the areas of language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation. We have utilized a well-studied model developed by Matveev and Nelson (2004) as a tool to guide us into the field of cross cultural communication competence. After reviewing the findings in this study, we extended the model to include the new competencies of *language proficiency* and *cross- cultural adaptation*.

Our first key finding is that language proficiency in the teams' shared language is a challenge for team members. This resulted in ineffective communication within the team. Because of the language proficiency, team members were not able to present their ideas, and had difficulty to understand each other. Accents and pronunciations were issues that created misunderstandings and confusions within the team. Primarily, language proficiency limited team members' communication ability, which made it hard for them to share knowledge, ideas and information.

All of these challenges lead to anxiety and lack of confidence in the expression of ideas and opinions since they were afraid they would use inappropriate words. All team members were aware of the language issue and were careful and cautious in the ways they communicated. They were all affected by the same problem, which made it easier since all applied the same approach towards it. They also became more comfortable with time and learned how to express themselves better. The key solution for misunderstandings and confusions was to frequently repeat what they said, speak slowly, explain, clarify regularly and show each other patience and flexibility. Since they team members had a background in design and engineering, the fundamental solution that facilitated the language issues was pictures and visuals. This unique way to communicate has eliminated many challenges related to their language proficiency.

Another key finding is cross-cultural adaptation; an additional competence that was revealed in our research. We noticed that it was highly important for all team members to adapt to the new culture and environment. They all were expected by the company to accept and change to new ways of interaction. With adaptation, less communication gaps occurred. Team members left behind old behaviors and ways of communicating. They had to learn the new ways, which facilitated the whole communication. With adaptation, they had fewer culture clashes and worked on a common ground, which made it easier for them to understand each other since they all applied the right skills to the right environment.

When team members learned the “right” way to communicate, communication and interaction became smoother. All team members’ ability to adapt was equally important. Previously, since they all had their different ways of communicating, it was impossible to conduct a successful communication with such a variety of ways.

Essentially the company did not consider their ethnicities, they all had the responsibility to accept and change to the new environment and culture. They have adapted their language, and other behaviors that can be perceived as sensitive in other cultures. Team members had to change their behavior in the sense of time management, decision-making authority and the informality within the organizational structure. They felt empowered and therefore took initiatives that led to more ideas, discussions and solutions to come forward. This ability simplified the communication since their way of working became less diverse and they have created an environment where the information flows became better. Fundamentally, as they adapted to the environment and culture, they become more comfortable in communicating in a new environment with each other.

5.1 Research implications

We hope that further research will be done in this area on a broader scale where the time and access is not as limited as in our case, since there is a need for more contributions in this field to get a broader understanding of the importance of language proficiency and cross-cultural adaptation in ethnically diverse teams. For further research we recommend that more studies be done to examine cross-cultural communication competence in ethnically diverse teams. Since we did not consider the leaders role in the process of this study, for future research we recommend other researchers to include the leader as an important player in this process. To achieve a broader scale of this study we recommend research to include ethnically diverse team, their leader and the organization and how these three areas interplay.

Although we were able to discover some key findings, we would encourage future research to determine if these findings are applicable in other ethnically diverse teams. In addition there may be other competences missing in the cross-cultural communication competence model.

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Appendix A – Interview guidelines

Interview questions for the Team Leader:

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Ethnicity

1. Do you have a diversity management program?
2. What strategies have you developed to promote diversity within your company?
 - a. How are these working?
3. What kind of training and knowledge have you obtained to lead this diverse team?
4. What was the reason for having such a diverse team? Increased competition? Creativity? Innovation?
5. Is your team the only ethnically diverse team in the company? Or do other diverse teams exist within the company?
6. Why did you decide to form an ethnically diverse team? When and how did it become so?
 - How did you choose the team members?
 - How do you coordinate the team? Examples?
 - What kind of challenges did you face in the beginning and how did you overcome them?
 - Was diversity a significant factor when selecting team-members?
7. How do you develop the communication process work in this ethnically diverse team?
8. What means of communication do you use to ease teamwork in this particular team?
 - Can you give us example of means you use? And what are the reasons you use those means?
 - Can you tell us a story?
9. How do you encourage constructive communication in this particular team?
 - Can you give us examples?

-Can you tell us a story about a time when you have encouraged constructive communication and you failed or succeeded?

10. Do you acknowledge cultural differences?

-By recognizing and respecting our differences?

-By trying to understand and accept each other's differences?

- Can you tell us about an occasion where you acknowledged the culture of a team member?

11. How do you create cohesion among collaborators in this team?

-How do you create a unity of purpose- to feel that the team members are working towards the same goal? Give examples?

-How do you create a WE 'feeling' instead of ME 'feeling' - examples?

-Do you provide them with equal access to information?

12. Can you give us an example how you encourage cooperation within this team?

13. How do you build empathy among collaborators in this ethnically diverse team?

14. Do you believe that misunderstandings come from linguistic challenges in your team?

-Do you have English or Swedish as your language of communication?

-Do you think your language of communication has an impact on the communication process? And if so, why and how can you give us examples?

-Does mother tongue have an impact on misunderstandings? (Use different speech patterns, power-distance, gender, class, race, body-language)

15. What kind of non-verbal codes do you use within the team?

-Gestures? Body language? Dress codes? Speech pattern?

16. Do you provide feedback to each other- to avoid misunderstandings?

- Feedback about ideas, projects, solutions, problems, discussions

- Do you do this occasionally or does it happen on a continuous basis?

- Can you explain how you provide each other with feedback?(verbally, in writing, privately, public, directly, indirectly)

- '*Praise in public and criticized in private*', is this applicable in the feedback within your team?

- Are you comfortable with giving and receiving destructive feedback from team members?

17. How do you support less participant team member's to participate in the communication process?

-What method do you use to make sure that everyone participates on equal footing?
Examples? (ex.voting,)

18. How is power distance demonstrated within this team? Equally or unequally, and why? Examples? (The extent to which employees accept that superiors have more power than they have. Opinions and decisions are right because of the higher position some has)

19. Uncertainty Avoidance: How tolerant are you to uncertainty avoidance?

-How do you proceed with changes, step-by-step, planning, rules, and laws?(tend to be emotional)(how do you feel communicating in this environment)

-Or, do you have an unstructured situation or challengeable environment? With few rules, planning, laws etc.? (ok with the unknown, change to happen).(how do you feel communicating in this environment)

20. Masculinity vs. femininity: How would you define your team?

-As a masculine team (where competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition is important)

-As a feminine team (where relationships and quality life is important)

21. What communication policies, practices, routines and procedures have you developed over time in this team? Can you give some examples?

- In reference to meetings, seminars, away days, fikas (policies= rules, Practices= make sure everyone's voice is heard by some means: writing, speaking, listening, visual means Routines= meetings Procedures= to facilitate communication, manuals, news letters)

22. How does an ethnically diverse team differ from a non-ethnically diverse team in terms of resources, training and communication?

-Regarding the three elements, are the needs of a diverse team different than a non-ethnically diverse team?

23. What are the advantages and disadvantages for communication in an ethnically diverse team? (Easier, harder, complicated, less complicated, creative, less creative, challenging, possibilities)

24. Do you have a communication-training program for your employees? Did the employees in this team receive training on communication?

-Can you describe the program they received and the purpose of it?

25. Do you and the organization encourage constructive conflicts among employees?

-In reference to work-related disagreements, heated discussions, and to have the courage to disagree?

- Can you describe how this is done in more detail?

26. Do you feel that you have developed a group/team identity?

-Can you describe how you have achieved this identity?

27. Do you acknowledge differences in the communicative and interactional styles of people from different cultures?

-How do you show that?

28. Do you feel comfortable when communicating with foreign nationals?

-Do you feel more comfortable with some with the same nationality?

29. Do you feel that you show patience in intercultural situations?

-Such as in misunderstandings or miscommunications- where you show tolerance and understanding because of cultural differences?

- Can you give any example where you often have to be patient due to intercultural communication?

30. Are you flexible in your way of working and communicating with diverse team members?

-Can you give any example when you had to be very flexible because of a team member with a different culture?

- Do you often change your communication routines to enable communication with intercultural team members?

31. Do you try to see the world from others cultural perspectives? How do you show this understanding?

32. Are you curious about other cultures communication patterns, and do you try to learn from these patterns?

Interview questions for team members

1. Gender

2. Age

3. Ethnicity

1. Do you acknowledge differences in the communicative and interactional styles of people from different cultures?

-How do you show that?

-By trying to understand and accept each other's differences?

- Can you tell us about an occasion where you acknowledged the culture of a team member?

2. Do you feel comfortable when communicating with foreign nationals?

-Do you feel more comfortable with the same nationality?

3. Do you feel that you show patience in intercultural situations?

-Such as in misunderstandings or miscommunications- where you show tolerance and understanding because of cultural differences?

- Can you give any example where you often have to be patient due to intercultural communication?

4. Are you flexible in your way of working and communicating with diverse team members?

-Can you give any example when you had to be very flexible because of a team member with a different culture?

- Do you often change your communication routines to enable communication with intercultural team members?

5. Do you try to see the world from others cultural perspectives? How do you show this understanding?

6. Are you curious about other cultures communication patterns, and do you try to learn from these patterns? (different ways of communicating).

7. Do you feel that you have developed a group/team identity? (WE instead of ME)

-Do you have your own specific jargon?

-How is this feeling demonstrated?

-Have you created a common sub-culture on the team level? Can you please elaborate on this?

8. Do you see any issues in the communication process because of the diversity within the team?

-In regard to: Feedback, response, conflicts, discussions, disagreements, message channels (because team members are used with different channels), masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance?

9. How is knowledge shared within your team?

- We have a knowledge management system, where you share knowledge within the team, can you please give us example how the system works?

-Do you feel comfortable sharing and receiving knowledge from your team members?

10. Do you feel your opinions and ideas are valued in the team discussions?

-Can you explain why you feel so? What are the reasons, give examples?

11. How do you overcome cultural differences in your team?

-By participating in ceremonies and events?

- Learning more about other cultures to gain a deeper understanding?

-Adjust to the organizational culture?

- Can you give examples?

12. Do you believe that misunderstandings come from linguistic challenges in your team?

-Do you have English or Swedish as your language of communication?

-Do you think your language of communication has an impact on the communication process?

And if so, why and how can you give us examples?

-Does mother tongue have an impact on misunderstandings? (Use different speech patterns, power-distance, gender, class, race, body-language)

13. Are you afraid to disagree?

-In discussions, with others ideas, solutions, opinions?

-With team members and the leader?

-Can you mention a time when you disagreed with either leader or a team member and what happened?

14. Do you provide feedback to each other- to avoid misunderstandings?

-Feedback about ideas, projects, solutions, problems, discussions

-Do you do this occasionally or does it happen on a continuous basis?

-Can you explain how you provide each other with feedback?(verbally, in writing, privately, public, directly, indirectly)

- '*Praise in public and criticized in private*' , is this applicable in the feedback within your team?

Are you comfortable with giving and receiving destructive feedback from team members?

15. How do you deal with conflicts in your team?

-Do you believe that problems can best be solved through communication or by ignoring them?

-Do you take initiatives to solve them immediately or wait for others to come to you?

-Do you solve them within the team or individually?

-Can you give examples how you usually solve conflicts that have occurred previously?

16. What is your attitude towards task-related conflicts and personal-related conflicts?

-Do you feel they contribute to more ideas, solutions, creativity at the end? – or do they have a negative impact on the end results?

-How do you avoid an overlap between task-related and personal-related conflicts?

-How do you avoid personal feelings getting in the way of the communication process?

-Can you give examples of task-related conflicts and personal-related conflicts and how you

dealt with them?

17. What kind of training were you provided?

- How to work in culturally diverse teams?
- Communication training, effective communication skills
- Did it have any affects on your communication processes?
- Can you describe a training-event and how it affected your team communication?

18. Do you feel supported by the structures and the policies in the company in relation to communication?

- What policies are in place that supports the communication process in this team?
- Do you feel that the structure and policies simply or complicate the communication in this team?
- Can you give us examples of different structures and policies in place that support or challenge the communication process in this team?

19. How do you identify yourself as a Swede, German?

- How do you avoid as a team member?
- Have you experienced any categorization in this team
- Do you encourage or discourage categorization?
- What kind of impact does the categorization have on this team?
- In what circumstances do you see/show categorization within this team? Examples?

20. What do you personally do to prevent the creation of stereotypes?

- Do you believe in or avoid assumptions?
- Do you get to know each individual?
- Do you Adopt logic, critical thinking and application of actual facts in place of stereotyping people
- Let people prove themselves to you
- Let them define themselves

21. Is the communication process applicable for team members such as yours, with different cultures?

- Does it take into consideration the fact that it is a culturally diverse team? Because of different languages, backgrounds, appropriate communication channels?
- Are you provided with necessary resources and the right amount of resources? (use the right, methods, procedures, policies used)

22. Who is responsible for the communication process to work?

- What is your role in the communication process? Can you be specific in terms of your roles and responsibilities in terms of the communication process?
- Who is responsible for making sure that the information is distributed to all team members?

--Who is responsible for the meeting-minutes?

23. What kind of educational and experience background did you have before joining this team?

-Do you have experience working in other diverse teams? Was it a positive or negative experience?

-Do you feel that your educational background allows you to contribute positively or negatively to this communication process you have in your team?