The Role of Language and Communicative Abilities in Transnational Labor Markets: Experiences from Finland

Katja Keisala[1a], Niina Kovalainen[2b], Arja Majakulma[3b], Pirkko Pitkänen[4a]

Abstract

The article aims to explain what kind of intercultural communication competence is needed in border crossing labor markets. The experiences of international higher education students and information and communications technology (ICT) experts are analyzed in different Finnish working and educational environments. We seek answers to the following questions: How are language and communicative abilities tied to individuals´ ability to participate in transnational labor markets? How is a valid intercultural communication competence produced in transnational settings? According to our results, the intercultural communication competence of individual job seekers is not evaluated in the recruitment situation, but employees are expected to acquire the necessary skills on the job. However, students and ICT experts face communication problems and marginalization due to inadequate communication skills. Even though the organization may facilitate intercultural communication and collaboration by structuring work and communication processes, it nevertheless demands a marked dedication to learning for individuals to succeed in a multicultural work organization.

[1] PhD, Email: katja.keisala@uta.fi (Corresponding Author)
  Tel: +358-503187474
[2] PhD Candidate, Email: niina.kovalainen@laurea.fi
[3] PhD Candidate, Email: arja.majakulma@laurea.fi
[4] Professor, Email: pirkko.pitkanen@uta.fi
[a] The University of Tampere, Finland
[b] Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland

1. Introduction

The world-wide diaspora of highly skilled educated people and the global competition for talent are prevalent trends in the contemporary world. An increasing number of countries are recruiting internationally, and an increasing numbers of skilled professionals are being drawn into transnational labor markets in which international recruitment is a significant component of human resource planning. As a part of the global competition for talent, many Western countries have also become more active in the international recruitment of tertiary-level students. For countries facing real or prospective skill shortages, university students represent 'semi-finished' highly skilled workers: students are either already highly educated and are going abroad for a postgraduate degree, or they will, through their studies abroad, gain an educational qualification, which puts them in the highly skilled category (Lall, 2006).

Both the volume and velocity of international recruitment and the number of source countries have steadily increased in recent decades. The total number of highly skilled migrants is unknown but it is a minority of those who move. Just who the highly skilled are is a matter for debate. Obviously they include those with advanced qualifications, students in tertiary education, experts in the fields of science and technology, professional managers, but also usually encompass those with more practical skills such as physicians (Skeldon, 2007).

Recruiting internationally entails that an increasing number of people exercise their professions in two or more countries or in virtual work communities. Not only has the volume of skilled migration increased, but the chains of transnational interaction have also extended and expanded considerably. Many ICT experts and tertiary-level students, in particular, have adopted highly mobile transnational lifestyles; they may be 'citizens of the world' whose main objective is to pursue career opportunities that will enable them to maximize their earnings and savings (Rao, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). For highly skilled employees like ICT experts, there are many opportunities to join the transnational labor markets. After having once been recruited by a multinational company, experts may work in their home countries, travel between the units of a company or migrate to other countries for shorter or longer periods, always working in a virtual environment.

Like other European countries, Finland has recently become active in the recruitment of university students and highly skilled professionals from abroad. In this article, we present the experiences of international higher education students and ICT experts in Finland as case studies in order to contemplate the applicability of lessons learned to other non-English speaking countries.

Increasing international recruitment practices give rise to novel questions about competence requirements. We seek answers to the following questions: What role does intercultural communication competence (ICC) play in the international recruitment practices? How are language and communicative abilities tied to the ability of individuals to engage in transnational labor markets? A further question is how could intercultural communication competence (ICC) be produced in transnational settings. These all are complex issues that highlight a need for a more profound understanding of the characteristics of the transnational labor market. In the following sections, we first outline the contextual background for the study and seek to ascertain how daily interaction in transnational contexts both draws on and contributes to intercultural communication skills. The ultimate aim is to understand the role ICC plays in the day-to-day interaction and work of highly educated people. We, therefore, analyze the experiences of ICT experts and tertiary-level students in different Finnish working and educational environments.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Characteristics of Transnational Labor Markets

There are various reasons for the emergence of transnational or even global labor markets among highly educated people. Students, ICT experts, and other highly skilled people have become increasingly global due to the economic restructuring that is making hanging on to a job universally precarious. Thus, not only low-income workers migrate to rich

countries; highly skilled professionals are increasingly going international, pulled by higher income and life opportunities elsewhere, or pushed by lack of opportunity at home. (Buchan, Kingma, & Lorenzo, 2005; Finlay, 2002.)

A significant element in international recruitment is the role of recruitment agencies as intermediaries in the process. Some are based in the source countries; others are located in destination countries but operate internationally. These agencies act on behalf of job seekers, charging their employers fees (and in some cases also the migrant workers) to recruit and transport the workers to the destination countries. (Buchan et al., 2005.) There are also many facilitating factors for transnational mobility of skilled occupations, such as rapid, easy and relatively inexpensive travel and communication. There is also evidence suggesting that international recruitment eventually creates transnational networks linking particular communities in the sending countries with specific labor markets in the receiving countries (see Pitkänen, Korpela, Aksakal, & Schmidt, 2017). When such networks are established, they may become valuable assets for those with access to them. Further important factors behind the current globalized labor market are the multinational corporations and the global financial and commodity markets. Alongside capital and trade flows, globalization has led to a greater interdependency of the labor markets throughout the world.

There are many reasons for international job-seeking: better quality of life, professional development, additional skills and education, better income, meeting family responsibilities such as providing for children, or the enrichment of becoming a member of a transnational community (Adams & Kennedy, 2006). Study abroad may likewise enhance one's academic credentials, offer better-paid employment opportunities and provide entry to influential professional networks. According to earlier studies, the major reasons for studying abroad fall into the following categories: lack of facilities at home, the commercial value of a foreign degree, and gaining experience in another country and culture (International Organization for Migration, 2008; Tremblay, 2005; Varghese, 2008).

Improving language skills and the cultural experience acquired while studying or working abroad are additional benefits. In the transnational labor market, expertise in a profession no longer suffice: professionals need social and cultural skills, knowledge of foreign cultures and societies, language skills and the ability to cope with diversity, in other words, working and interaction competences. An effective way to develop these competences is to study abroad.

It is apparent that internationally trained professionals are not always utilized productively in the receiving societies. The literature has identified numerous barriers to their employment, including language and communication difficulties (Adams & Kennedy, 2006). Language is a major barrier to employment, especially in non-English speaking destination countries. In recent years, many non-English speaking European countries (e.g., Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands) have assumed an increasingly active role in the global competition to attract highly educated people from abroad. (Li & Pitkänen, 2018.) In practice, however, the mobility of highly skilled workers and tertiary-level students from Asia and other continents mainly focuses on the USA, Australia, Canada and other English-speaking countries. In Europe the UK has attracted the lion's share, while the non-English speaking of Europe faces serious challenges in their recruitment processes (Fargues et al., 2009). In some cases, such as decentralized units of multinational companies, the official working language is English, which makes it easier for English-speaking employees to join a local or virtual work community.

2.1. Communication Competence as a Part of a Professional Expertise

A workplace may well be a setting where individuals are most likely to encounter people with different cultural backgrounds (Martin & Nakayama, 2015). Work processes rely on successful communication and co-operation to such an extent that many work organizations have become knowledge-intensive innovation centers in which collaborative work, networking, and transformative learning are key concepts (Tynjälä, Slotte, Nieminen, Lonka, & Olkinuora, 2006). Especially in labor

markets focusing on knowledge, information, and services, language and communication are an integral part of people´s jobs, and communication competence is included in the professional expertise (Piller, 2011; Tynjälä et al., 2006).

The communication competence needed in transnational labor markets is usually conceptualized as intercultural communication competence (ICC), which generally refers to a person´s ability to communicate in an appropriate and effective manner with others of diverse cultural backgrounds (Perry & Southwell, 2011). From a social constructivist perspective intercultural communication is approached as "a symbolic, interpretative, transactional and contextual process in which the degree of difference between people is large and important enough to create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about what are regarded as competent behaviors that should be used to create shared meanings" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1993, p. 58). Even though differences between people are assumed to be cultural, culture does not necessarily refer to national cultures, but may also be regional, ethnic, linguistic, organizational, occupational or relational entities (Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015).

The definition of intercultural communication frames our understanding of a set of capabilities needed to communicate competently in intercultural encounters. Usually, ICC is seen to be based on several attributes, skills, and knowledge, presented as the ABC -model, including Affect, Behaviors and Cognition/ Knowledge (Martin, 2015).

Affect refers to attitudes towards different people and intercultural encounters as well as the emotions experienced in the intercultural communication processes. Attitudes and affects strengthening a person´s intercultural communication competence include respect for others, patience, empathy, curiosity, openness and acceptance of uncertainty (Martin & Nakayama, 2015).

Further, behaviors refer to a person´s ability to participate in an effective manner in intercultural communication. The important capabilities include an ability to participate in a meaningful way into a dialogue, search for new information and solutions, and resolve

misunderstandings and contradictions. It is also important to be able to bring tacit knowledge into awareness and build a common understanding by negotiating reality. An ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language without distorting the message conveyed may also be considered a behavioral skill of intercultural communication. (Byram, 1997; Friedman & Antal, 2005; Holden, 2002; Kemppainen, 2009; Koehn & Rosenau, 2002; Sercu, 2004.)

Finally, cognition/knowledge refers to a person´s awareness that we all see the world from our own viewpoint and therefore interpret situations and behaviors differently. Such awareness can be achieved through an understanding of others´ ways of interpreting the world (other cultures), or by critical reflection, for example, examining how one´s own backgrounds, experiences, and economic/ political/cultural/social situations lead to different interpretations, reasoning, behavior and communication (Cunliffe, 2004; Gray, 2007). Cognition/knowledge also includes an ability to recognize prejudices and discriminative practices (Bairoh & Trux, 2010; Jokikokko, 2010; Morgan & Dennehy, 2004).

The focus of ICC has shifted from information transformation between individuals towards constructing common meanings within the processes of communication, the theorization of third cultures being one example of this and negotiation of reality another (Friedman & Antal, 2005; Koole & Thije, 2001; Ramsey, 2005; Saastamoinen, 2009). In the framework of the third culture, the essential skill of intercultural communication appears to be an ability to jointly negotiate and develop that cultural framework in which interaction and communication may take place (Kovalainen & Keisala, 2012; Saastamoinen, 2009; Tiittula, 2005).

The ABC conceptualization of ICC has been criticized for being too western-centered, individualist-focused, discriminative and blind to the effects of power relations on communication (Collier, 2015; Gorski, 2008; Kramsch, 2002; Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015; Martin & Nakayama, 2015; Piller, 2011). For example, Asian employees may be at a disadvantage compared to their European and American colleagues if the understanding of

ICC is western-centered (Martin & Nakayama, 2015; Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015; Miike, 2007; Xiao & Chen, 2009; Yum, 2012). The dominant models of ICC may not fit well with the Finnish communication style, either, since this often includes non-verbal hints and indirect messages, and participants in the communication are expected to understand situations and meanings without exchanging verbal information (Salo & Poutiainen, 2010; Salo-Lee, 1998).

It has been suggested that assessing ICC may discriminate against some people and increase structural inequality among various groups, leading to inequality and social exclusion in the workplace, unequal access to desirable employment and reinforced colonial power relations (Martin & Nakayama, 2015; Piller, 2011). Moreover, individually possessed competencies may not be the most significant determinants when evaluating a person´s competence, since personal characteristics and membership of cultural groups can be interpreted as signs of a lack of competence. The ability to use a shared language also affects how a person´s other capabilities are evaluated, since linguistic proficiency (or lack thereof) constrains the identity one can perform. (Piller, 2011.)

3. Methodology

This article is based on three sets of data collected by means of semi-structured interviews with tertiary-level students and ICT experts in Finland. The first data set consists of interviews with degree-seeking students in Finland conducted in the period September 2008 – January 2009. Interviewees totaled 31 students studying three universities and two universities of applied sciences (polytechnics). Fourteen of these Finnish and the others came from 12 countries: Brazil, China, Ghana, India, Japan, Latvia, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

The second data set was collected by interviewing 21 bachelor´s program graduates in various disciplines and of various national backgrounds (Africa, Asia, Central America, and Europe) in the period 2008 – 2010.

The third data set was gathered in 2011 in the Finnish unit of a multinational ICT-company.

This includes the company documents (Human Resource Strategy, Directions for Managers, Evaluation Standards), interviews with its employees and the observations of phone conferences. The interviewees were working in the same project in virtual teams with members based at different locations. Nineteen of them worked in units located in their home countries, but all of them participated in collaborative development work in virtual workspaces, using English as a lingua franca. Among the twenty interviewees there were one Brazilian, two Chinese, four Finns, three Germans, eight Indians and two Portuguese.

All the interviews were recorded. The interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively, using interpretative content analysis. The coding scheme for the common analysis was created on the basis of the common theoretical-conceptual framework.

4. Results

4.1. Experiences of Intercultural Communication among Students and ICT Experts

4.1.1. Tertiary-Level Students Appreciated Language Skills

When pondering intercultural communication the international higher education students often talked about culture-specific knowledge and language skills as if these were the only competencies needed. Although the interviewees emphasized the importance of communication skills, they were unable to mention any particular ICC skills, but analyzed the differences as well as similarities between cultures, and especially communication cultures. It was said that understanding of the culture develops with exposure and experience.

> Trying to understand the culture of the people here is also another factor. We really do not understand, we have differences in culture, the way we act towards people, for example, it matters a lot ... If we have a very good understanding of differences in the culture it helps. (African graduate)

Coping in work contexts, in particular, was seen to require the ability to recognize cultural

differences and to take them into consideration in interaction.

> [P]eople have their own culture, they have their own views, you know they have their own values, you understand what I mean, so it is always very important to look at interaction as in a global sense … So you look at it first, globally, what it means and then practically, in that situation. (African graduate)

The international students considered knowledge and understanding of Finnish society to be vital, since Finnish culture was seen to differ a lot from the culture of their countries of origin. The fact that few people abroad were familiar with and have experiences of Finnish culture made it difficult for them to cope.

> [T]he Finnish culture is so apart from other cultures in a sense, that it is a big thing how things should be run in Finland because I think that if you go to the States everyone knows how the Americans are, there are so many examples all over the place, but not many know how Finnish people are. The cultural aspect is quite a big thing in Finland. (European graduate)

Many international students mentioned that they had another kind of cultural competence in addition to knowledge of the local culture, in other words, knowing other cultures resulting from their experiences of living elsewhere. Because of the multicultural experience, they were able to bring new ideas and ways of thinking and in some cases specific knowledge and experience from their regions of origin. Several students also described the presence of different cultures in the working environment and how they had been able to use their language skills and cultural competence at work. In the Helsinki metropolitan area there are already quite many people of non-Finnish origin working in health care and in the business sector. In addition to the workers, clients, too, had different cultural backgrounds, and some international graduates described how they had been able to utilize certain features that are specific to their cultures with non-Finnish clients or customers. Some of the interviewees thought that their general multicultural experience had had a positive effect on their employability. Others, however, said that the employers did not necessarily appreciate cultural competence as much as other qualifications.

Some interviewees assumed that ICC is about an ability to speak English or Finnish. International students manage very well in English in the Finnish academic context, which is one reason for not learning Finnish. In studying environments all the interviewees felt at ease using English, since it is the lingua franca on the campuses alongside Finnish. They realized, however, that as soon as the communication became more profound, one had a greater need for good language skills. The Finnish language became more important on transferring to the working environment and to every-day communication outside university contexts. Without language skills in Finnish, international students did not acquire Finnish friends or made other social contacts. As a result, international students faced problems in their socio-cultural integration and, in particular, major difficulties in finding jobs after graduation or during their studies, whereas Finnish students felt they need English skills in order to ensure their future employment.

For some international graduates, a good knowledge of Finnish had been helpful in seeking employment, while for others not knowing Finnish well enough had been an obstacle. One interviewee noted that Finland is not a country of two official languages (he did not know about the official status of Swedish), since he had noticed an emphasis on Finnish language skills when positions were being filled. It was mentioned that foreigners sometimes did not have as many options to choose from due to lack of language skills. Even those speaking Finnish were often worried about coping in demanding professional situations. They demanded a lot of themselves, and felt that in certain positions the language proficiency had to be very good. Others were more confident about their skills and did not expect to be perfect. Neither, according to the graduates, all employers seemed to expect excellent language skills, even in fields where skills in Finnish were needed, as in health care and social services.

Many were working in a Finnish-speaking environment, while for some the working language was English. They still emphasized the importance of knowing Finnish, since if one did not understand the language it was not possible to fully understand what was going on. Students who were already in working environments put effort into learning Finnish, and all their colleagues deemed this positive. The interviewees also reflected on the connection between language and culture. They found that it was not possible to understand the culture without knowing the language. Even if they could cope with for example using English, they would really not understand what was going around.

> A language is a reflection of the culture of the people that are speaking. For example Finnish, and I joke about this, Finnish is like data compressor, it is a language designed to give the largest amount of knowledge in the shortest amount of time. (Mexican graduate)

Language skills other than Finnish, either their mother tongue or English, were also thought to be valuable when seeking employment. In a few cases, language skills were the main reason for obtaining employment.

4.1.2. Communication between ICT Experts Was Founded on Shared Values

The documents of the ICT -company articulated the shared values which formed a basis for collaborative work. The most important values were open communication, respect for diversity, equal opportunities and innovativeness. The company aimed to increase its flexibility by offshoring and shifting work to units in low-income countries. Since diversity was continuously increasing, the documents highlighted the importance of a common global understanding of appropriate ways of leading, managing, working and communicating. The company had developed common standards for evaluating the performance of experts, managers and leaders at various levels. In addition to technical skills, behavior and communication skills were also evaluated. The explicit standards pointed towards better performance – and towards better positions and salaries, since promotion was only possible after reaching certain levels of performance.

The official working language of the company, English, was a foreign language for most. The employees were not expected to speak perfect English as long as they understood each other well enough to collaborate. Finnish was used in the Finnish units, especially in informal discussions and during breaks, but it was usually replaced with English when a foreign fellow joined the group.

Formal communication within the company was thus well structured and everyone was expected to know how to collaborate. Managerial and working models were derived from values and principles, and formed the basis of the company´s work culture. The personnel had been assisted in adopting the values, models, and practices of the company through training. The interviewees also commented that shared values, principles and practices guided their work: '[T]his framework of management /…/ forces people to work in a specific way'. (Portuguese expert)

In the observed phone conferences, all the participants seemed to have a clear understanding about conference procedures and the appropriate ways of sharing information. This observation was confirmed by the interviewees, who commented that communication was easiest in formal work situations like phone conferences. However, lack of English language skills might cause failure to reach a common understanding even when the models of communication were familiar to all.

The interviewees reported that the values, principles and practices of the company were coherent with their work model called Agile method, which was based on collaboration, open communication, learning and continuous assessment of work. Since the Agile method forced experts to participate in continuous information sharing, it was no surprise that all the interviewees considered communication an essential part of their work. Even though the Chinese and Indian experts considered the open communication model contradictory to the communication models more familiar to them, they did not want to challenge it, but emphasized its benefits and their willingness to learn it. All interviewees agreed that in the successful communication situation everyone presented their views, everyone was listened to

and participants were able to use a shared language. According to them, an employee needed certain characteristics to be able to fully participate in multicultural and collaborative work: one needed to be open-minded, tolerant, willing to learn from other cultures and capable of adapting in different ways of communicating and working.

> I think they have to be open first, open to receive different information - - And they also need to communicate with people, they need to be also capable to express their own opinion to others. I think it´s, let´s say, language skills especially it´s a key - - I think it´s very important to our times. (Chinese expert)

The experts described various strategies to clarify meanings and build a common understanding, many of them demonstrating the ability to utilize technology in communication. For example, they used e-mail messages with the colleagues who spoke a variety of English they found difficult to understand. Hence, using English as a lingua franca created some challenges for communication. The interviewees reported that in all units there were employees who avoided communication across borders because they felt they did not know enough English themselves or that English of their colleagues was too difficult to understand mainly because of different accents. Chinese employees, in particular, had a shorter history of learning English than others. When the Chinese participants were expected to use English at international conferences, they could not necessarily express their views and even following the conference proceedings was sometimes difficult.

Intercultural communication was deemed more challenging in those cases where not all participants had adopted the values, norms, and practices of the company. For example, Chinese experts were reportedly too passive in discussions, and Indian colleagues were criticized for not giving enough information about the progress of their tasks. In addition, the interviewees commented that without personal contact it was difficult to understand another person´s views and communication styles even within the company frameworks. Different communication styles were seen as results of different cultures, and many interviewees felt

they needed more information about other cultures. Finnish experts often mentioned uncertainty about finding a common understanding with their Indian colleagues.

> When they answer, yes yes yes yes, we will take care, and three months past and nothing happens, then I think, how should I say things, how should I confirm messages, to make them clear, so that they know what they are doing. So that they don´t just say yes yes. (Finnish expert, author´s translation from Finnish to English)

On the other hand, Germans especially criticized the communication style of Finnish colleagues for 'not being very communicative'. Sometimes Finns were even deemed impolite.

> [T]heir answers are very short and hard somehow, so maybe I have felt hurt a little bit personally in the beginning /.../ when I had more exchange or phone call then I got used to it somehow and also understood that that is how they are /.../ that is somehow their style. (German expert)

It was also reported that on occasions when employees had a chance to move to another unit and work there, they could not create connections with colleagues due to a lack of communication and language skills. Shared professional knowledge did not seem to help in informal situations, although in formal communication it had a crucial role.

Negative stereotypes may have undermined the willingness of the Finnish experts to try their best in challenging communication situations. It emerged that sometimes they did not continue explaining their point, but started criticizing their Indian colleagues basing their criticism on national stereotypes. The European interviewees commented that negative attitudes towards their non-European colleagues had increased because jobs are flowing from European to Asian units, and many of their European colleagues had lost their jobs while more Asians had been recruited. Quite often European experts were expected to assist their recently recruited Asian colleagues in learning their work, but insecurity about their own jobs decreased their willingness to share information

– they were afraid that by sharing information they would render themselves superfluous.

4.2. The ICC Benefits Individuals and Organizations

According to our data, ICC was still mostly considered as an individual asset even though this interpretation has been criticized in the research literature. In the cases of ICT experts and international graduates employed in Finland, jobseekers´ ICC was not evaluated in recruitment situations. Some international graduates stated, however, that the employers had valued their intercultural experience in recruitment, and some had benefitted from their language skills or knowledge of the culture and markets of their country of origin. At the end of their studies, students expected to have better career opportunities, either in their home country, the country of study, or a third country. Several studies suggest that people with international experience prior to graduation were clearly more likely to be internationally mobile and to take over jobs at home which require international competencies (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Teichler & Janson, 2007; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008).

International students assumed that their international experience would equip them with ICC, although they were unable to mention any particular competencies in addition to language skills and cultural knowledge. The ICT experts likewise mentioned cultural knowledge and language skills as important competencies, but also described numerous attitudes, individual characteristics and behavioral skills needed by an individual to be able to fully participate in the intercultural collaboration. For example, respect for others, willingness to learn from others and acceptance of open communication were mentioned together with the communication competence enabling them to create connections and build personal relationships, to seek and share new information and solutions, test new ways of behavior and resolve misunderstandings.

The international students stated that without Finnish language skills it was difficult to find employment. They suspected that the foreign cultural background counted against jobseekers if they did not speak Finnish. The lack of Finnish language skills hindered the employment of the international students in at least two ways. First, without proficiency in Finnish international students did not make social contacts in Finland, resulting in problems in socio-cultural integration and employment. Secondly, Finnish language skills were required by many employers, even though they did not expect a particularly high standard.

In the ICT -company, Finnish language skills were not required even of employees located physically in Finland, but the experts were assumed to know enough English or learn it fairly fast by working and participating in the English language instruction provided by the company. Insufficient English language skills led some experts to avoid intercultural communication situations with the possible consequence of their being marginalized in the work community. Working with colleagues having inadequate English language skills (like Chinese experts) increased anxiety and stress among others, and sometimes led to negative stereotyping based on the nationality of those who most often were unable to communicate in English.

Despite challenges, both the international students and ICT experts had assumed the idea of diversity being to the ultimate advantage of business and service. International recruitment is often seen as an opportunity to add value in business through innovation, learning, better decision-making and business improvements (Lockwood, 2015). While the experts emphasized innovation, learning and competitiveness, the international students mentioned several examples of situations in which they had been able to use certain characteristics of communication typical in their cultures of origin for the benefit of the clients or customers and also the organizations they were working in.

Iinternational recruitment increases the pool of talent to recruit from. Finland is one of the countries facing skill shortages especially in the field of health care. Many other national and multinational organizations also need to recruit internationally experienced work-force. In the case of the ICT -company, the English language competence of highly skilled Indian experts, and their willingness to learn intercultural communication skills and adapt themselves to

multinational work models made Indian workforce attractive.

4.3. Producing Valid ICC in Transnational Settings

Both the international students and ICT experts described many problems in working in a multicultural environment. The interviewees often felt that without knowing the others´ culture it was hard to understand their ways of interpreting, reasoning and behaving. The ICT experts reported continuous disruptions in communication, leading to misunderstandings, delays on projects and a lack of trust, while the international students described unwritten rules that were very difficult to understand and erroneous expectations concerning, for example, group work. For most interviewees, building personal relationships and common understanding was difficult, especially in informal situations. The interviewees mentioned the low hierarchies of Finnish study and working environments as facilitating intercultural communication, but also necessitating that one understands how to work independently and effectively.

The role of ICC seems to be particularly important in countries like Finland, where communication often includes non-verbal hints and indirect messages and where one is expected to respect unwritten rules. The case of the ICT -company demonstrates that a lot can be done at the organizational level to improve intercultural communication. The common values, structures and practices as well as management and work models of the organization may facilitate communication by reducing the amount of possible interpretations of linguistic and non-linguistic acts. The company also highlighted the significance of its employees´ communicative competence by evaluating it yearly. Commonly known evaluation criteria pointed the way towards the communication models supported by the company.

For international students, the programs with English as the medium of instruction and the multicultural student groups offered opportunities to acquire cultural competence and communication skills. Having intercultural competence as a topic in the curriculum was deemed important. There seemed to be room for improvement here, since offering programs through the medium of English and including students from different cultures does not necessarily enhance ICC if it is not actually included in the curriculum. The development of language skills during studies was also considered important, in addition to English and Swedish (Swedish is the second language in Finland), it was argued that there should be more opportunities to study other languages. Integrating students into work in Finland also entails compulsory Finnish language courses.

That the ICT experts still reported persistent misunderstandings and casual inappropriate behavior suggests that the company framework supporting intercultural collaboration need to be complemented by individual ICC. Both the international students and the ICT experts would benefit from the skills for rendering tacit knowledge explicit and build a common understanding by the negotiation of reality. Negotiation of reality refers to the process by which participants examine their own and other people´s implicit and explicit assumptions, expectations, targets and possible roles concerning a situation, and decide together what kind of communication and behavior is appropriate (Friedman & Antal, 2005). This presupposes an ability for critical reflection, which is the part of the cognitive competence of ICC clearly unknown to the students and ICT experts. Even though the interviewees were generally able to examine the differences between communication cultures, they did not know how to render explicit their own and others´ expectations, making them keen to acquire cultural knowledge. The fact that ICT experts utilized national stereotypes to explain failures in communication suggests, however, that ICC training should not encourage stereotyping by offering cultural knowledge, but emphasize the growing ability to critically reflect on one´s own ways of perceiving, reasoning and behaving, which facilitates understanding other people´s ways of communicating. Cognitive competence would also reduce the problems caused by lack of language proficiency, and support language learning.

Since negotiation of reality necessitates the willingness and ability to share information concerning assumptions and expectations of a situation, however, it may be said to favor

North American and European employees over their Asian colleagues (Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015), at least assuming that there is a direct Western approach and an indirect Asian approach to communication. In this framework it is interesting that all the ICT experts interviewed considered the open communication model beneficial because it is conducive to information sharing. Hence efficiency of communication was favored over appropriateness even by Indian and Chinese ICT experts, who are not believed to be as goal-directed in their communication as 'Westerners' (Xiao & Chen, 2009).

In addition to Indian and Chinese experts, the Finns were also criticized for not being dialogical enough. While the company´s communication models supported collaboration, they also made it apparent if the communication styles of some experts did not meet their standards. Standards are never impartial and may thus discriminate against those whose competence may also be judged according to their assumed group identity. In the ICT -company it was evident that expertise and professionalism were clearly associated with the European experts, including Finns. The interviewees explained this by referring to the higher turnover rate of Indian and Chinese employees and to the younger age of the Indian and Chinese experts. It was also possible that evaluating ICC discriminated against some people and increased structural inequality among various groups. All interviewees connected the open communication model to the Western way of communication, but none of the Indian or Chinese interviewees felt discriminated against because of the model itself. Some of them still suspected that the evaluation of ICC might be utilized in an attempt to maintain unequal positions inside the company.

5. Concluding Remarks

The research revealed that intercultural communication competence as an attribute of individual students and employees benefited individuals and their work organizations. Even though the ICC of jobseekers was not evaluated in the recruitment situation, intercultural collaboration was difficult if employees did not have the necessary communication competence, resulting in misunderstandings, delays in

projects, building national stereotypes, lack of trust and marginalization of some members of a work community. Apart from multinational companies, Finnish language skills were important when taking up for employment in Finland. In addition to language skills, students and ICT experts needed better capabilities to jointly negotiate and develop a cultural framework in which interaction and communication could take place. The role of ICC seemed to be even more important in countries like Finland, where communication often included non-verbal hints and indirect messages.

Even though ICC was usually seen as an individual asset, it may also be created at the group level by structuring work and communication processes. A lot can be done at the organizational level to improve intercultural communication, and the responsibility for fluent communication should not fell solely upon individual employees. Even if work and communication processes favored intercultural communication, it nevertheless demands a marked dedication to learning for individuals to succeed in a multicultural work organization.

Acknowledgment

References

Adams, E., & Kennedy, A. (2006). *Positive practice environment: Key considerations for the development of a framework to support the integration of international nurses.* Geneva, Switzerland: International Centre on Nurse Migration.

Bairoh, S., & Trux M-L. (2010). Identiteettejä, valtaa, kulttuuria – katsaus monimuotoisuusjohtamisen suuntauksiin [Identities, power, culture – review to the approaches of diversity management]. In S. Wrede & C. Nordberg (Eds.), *Vieraita työssä. Työelämän etnistyvä eriarvoisuus* [Foreigners in the work. Ethnic inequality in the work life] (pp. 193–228). Helsinki, Finland: Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press.

Buchan, J., Kingma, M., & Lorenzo F. M. (2005). *International migration of nurses: Trends and policy implications.*

Geneva, Switzerland: International Council of Nurses.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence.* Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Collier, M. J. (2015). Intercultural communication competence: Continuing challenges and critical directions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 48*, 9–11.

Crossman, J., & Clarke, M. (2010). International experience and graduate employability: Stakeholder perceptions on the connection. *Higher Education, 59*(5), 599–613.

Cunliffe, A. L. (2004). On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner. *Journal of Management Education, 28*(4), 407–426.

Fargues, P., Chanda, R., Cholewinski, R., Guilmoto, C., Hultin, G., Meyer, J-B., … Wiesbrock, A. (2009). *EU-India mobility cooperation: A strategic asset and a field of opportunities* (SWG Policy Brief No. 1). Fiesole, Italia: European University Institute.

Finlay, A., & Lowell, L. (2002). *Migration of highly skilled persons from developing countries: Impact and policy responses* (paper No. 43). Geneva, Switzerland: ILO.

Friedman, V. J., & Ariane, B. A. (2005). Negotiating reality: A theory of action approach to intercultural competencies. *Management Learning, 36*(1), 69–86.

Gorski, P. C. (2008). Good intentions are not enough: A decolonizing intercultural education. *Intercultural Education, 19*(6), 515–525.

Gray, D. E. (2007). Facilitating management learning. Developing critical reflection through reflective tools. *Management Learning, 38*(5), 495–517.

Holden, N. (2002). *Cross-cultural management: A knowledge management perspective.* London, UK: Prentice-Hall, Pearson Education.

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2008). *World migration report 2008: Managing labor mobility in the evolving global economy* (IOM World Migration Series No. 4). Geneva, Switzerland: IOM.

Jokikokko, K. (2010). *Teacherʹs intercultural learning and competence*. Oulu, Finland: University of Oulu.

Kemppainen, R. (2009). Liike-elämän näkökulma [Business approach]. In J. Lasonen & M. Halonen (Eds.), *Kulttuurienvälinen osaaminen koulutuksessa ja työelämässä* [Intercultural competence in education and work life] (pp. 107–127). Jyväskylä, Finland: Finnish Educational Research Association.

Koehn, P. H., & Rosenau, J. N. (2002). Transnational competence in an emergent epoch. *International Studies Perspectives, 3*(2), 105–127.

Koole, T., & Ten Thije, J. D. (2001). The reconstruction of intercultural discourse: Methodological considerations. *Journal of Pragmatics, 33*(4), 571–587.

Kovalainen, N., & Keisala, K. (2012). The role of shared foreign language in intercultural communication: A case of working environments. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2*(20), 52–72.

Kramsch, C. (2002). In search of the international. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 6*(2), 275–285.

Lall, M. (2006). *Indian students in Europe: Trends, constraints and prospects - Living in 'the age of migration'* (Briefing Paper for the Academic Network for European Research on India). London, UK: Institute of Education, University of London.

Ladegaard, H. J., & Jenks, C. J. (2015). Language and intercultural communication in the workplace: Critical approaches to theory and practice. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 15*(1), 1–12.

Li, H., & Pitkänen, P. (2018). Understanding the integration of mainland Chinese students: The case of Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research 8*(2), 107-115.

Lockwood, J. (2015). Virtual team management: what is causing communication breakdown? *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *15*(1), 125–140.

Martin, J. N. (2015). Revisiting intercultural communication competence: Where to go from here. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 48*, 6–8.

Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (2015). Reconsidering intercultural (communication) competence in the workplace: A

dialectical approach. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 15*(1), 13–28.

Miike, Y. (2007). An Asiacentric reflection on Eurocentric bias in communication theory. *Communication Monographs, 74*(2), 272–278.

Morgan, S., & Dennehy, R. F. (2004). Using stories to reframe the social construction of reality: A trio of activities. *Journal of Management Education, 28*(3), 372–389.

Perry, L. B., & Southwell, L. (2011). Developing intercultural understanding and skills: Models and approaches. *Intercultural Education, 22*(6), 453–466.

Piller, I. (2011). *Intercultural communication. A critical introduction.* Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Pitkänen, P., Korpela, M., Aksakal, M., & Schmidt, K. (Eds.). (2017). Characteristics of temporary migration in Asian-European transnational social spaces. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-61258-4#about

Rao, B. (2001). *Economic migrants in a global labor market. A report on the recruitment and retention of Asian computer professionals by Canadian high tech firms.* Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Ramsey, C. (2005). Narrative: From learning in reflection to learning in performance. *Management Learning*, *36*(2), 219–235.

Ruben, B. D. (2015). Intercultural communication competence in retrospect: Who would have guessed? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 48*, 22–23.

Saastamoinen, R. (2009). Lähestymistapoja ja kehityskohteita kulttuurienvälisen vuorovaikutusosaamisen tutkimuksessa [Perspectives and points of development in the research of intercultural communication]. Retrieved from http://prologos.fi/prologi/index.php?page=vuosikirjat&year=2009

Salo, M., & Poutiainen, S. (2010). Hiljainen ja suora suomalainen? Käsityksiä suomalaisesta viestinnästä maahanmuuttajien perehdytys- ja työyhteisön monikulttuurisuusoppaissa [A quiet and direct Finn? The views about the Finnish communication presented in the diversity manuals for immigrants]. In T. Seppälä (Ed.), *Näkökulma monikulttuuriseen esimiestyöhön*

ja henkilöstöjohtamiseen [Approaches to diversity management and HRM] (pp. 1–30). Helsinki, Finland: University of Helsinki.

Salo-Lee, L. (1998). Kieli, kulttuuri ja viestintä [Language, culture and communication]. In L. Salo-Lee, R. Malmberg, & R. Halinoja (Eds.), *Me ja muut. Kulttuurienvälinen viestintä* [We and the others. Intercultural communication] (pp. 6–35). Jyväskylä, Finland: Gummerus.

Sercu, L. (2004). Assessing intercultural competence: A framework for systematic test development in foreign language education and beyond. *Intercultural Education*, *15*(1), 73–89.

Skeldon, R. (2007). Migration and labor markets in Asia and Europe. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal, 16*, 425–441.

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1993). *Interpersonal communication competence.* London, UK: Sage Publications.

Spitzberg, B. H. (2015). Is past prologue, or just passed and lacking presence? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 48*, 24–26.

Teichler, U., & Janson, K. (2007). The professional value of temporary study in another European country: Employment and work of former ERASMUS students. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 11*(3/4), 486–495.

Tiittula, L. (2005). Monikulttuurisuus ja viestintä. In P. Pitkänen (Ed.), *Kulttuurien välinen työ* (pp. 123–135). Helsinki, Finland: Edita.

Tremblay, K. (2005). Academic Mobility and Immigration. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 9*(3), 196–228.

Tynjälä, P., Slotte, V., Nieminen, J., Lonka, K., & Olkinuora, E. (2006). From university to working life: Graduates' workplace skills in practice. In P. Tynjälä, J. Välimaa, & G. Boulton-Lewis (Eds.), *Higher education and working life - collaborations, confrontations and challenges* (pp. 73–88). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier.

Varghese, N. V. (2008). *Globalisation of higher education and cross-border student mobility.* Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001579/157989e.pdf

Vertovec, S. (2004). Migrant transnationalism and modes of transformation.

International Migration Review, 38(3), 970–1001.

Wiers-Jenssen, J. (2008). Does higher education attained abroad lead to international jobs? *Journal of Studies in International Education, 12*(2), 101–130.

Xiao, X., & Guo-Ming, C. (2009). Communication competence and moral competence: A Confucian perspective. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 4*(1), 61–74.

Yum, J. O. (2012). Communication competence: A Korean perspective. *China Media Research, 8*(2), 11–17.