

# Intercultural Sensitivity and Teamwork

Case Study: Students at Lahti UAS

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ABSTRACT

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Efficient teamwork can improve the ability to learn or improve the quality of team outcomes. Meanwhile, with the acceleration of internationalization, intercultural cooperation has become a trend. People of different cultural backgrounds get together with diverse ideologies, customs, religious beliefs, etc. In this circumstance, intercultural sensitivity is urgently needed.

The focus of the study is to evaluate and measure how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork. It is aimed at to improving the efficiency and quality of teamwork, and reducing the negative impact of intercultural sensitivity on teamwork. This will be highly helpful for future study and work in this globalized society.

The results of the study show that intercultural sensitivity mainly affects people's ideologies and behaviours, and intercultural sensitivity's impact on teamwork is increasingly positive.

Keywords: Teamwork, intercultural sensitivity, globalization

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

In the history of human development, a variety of cultures came into being. The formation of culture is based on customs, ideas, beliefs, language, geographical features of a place, of a particular society, country, etc. Scholars have many different definitions of culture. For example, *Intermediate Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary (2002, 292)* states that culture is, "the customs, ideas, beliefs, etc. of a particular society, country, etc."

At present, people of different cultures are intertwined and formed a special cultural circle. Whether in work or study time, people are inevitably working with people of different cultures. And then, be unconsciously influenced, there will be a group or team cultures. Thus, Intercultural sensitivity becomes important. Personal intercultural sensitivity greatly affects the group culture, efficiency and quality, etc.

"Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong (Stafford, Bowman, Eking, Hanna, & Lopoies-Defede 1997, 33)."

Therefore, in order to improve the efficiency and quality of studying and work, it is important to understand how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The world is becoming more and more international and globalized. There are people from diverse cultures in one country. People can catch a sight of this in so many different areas, such as in universities and companies.

With the acceleration of internationalization, international cooperation is more frequent than before. It brings a lot of advantages and also creates

unique and formidable challenges. For the most part, in international cooperation, it is very important to communicate well. But people are never same, and different people have different ways to talk, think and listen. Therefore, mistakes occur.

During their studies, students from different countries gather together. Sometimes, they are divided into groups to work on study projects. However, when students from different cultures communicate with each other, misunderstandings occur. If there are too many misunderstandings, a team becomes a low efficiency team and is unlikely to complete a given project. Therefore, it is very necessary to study these cases and try to find some ways to solve those problems.

In order to improve the efficiency of work in the future, it is important to understand how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork.

### 1.3 Overview

This study consists of seven chapters. The following figure shows the structure of the thesis:



## Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

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- Background knowledge about culture and intercultural sensitivity.
- Statement of the problems.
- Overview of the whole thesis.

## Chapter 2 RESEARCH TASK

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- Research questions, research methods, research framework and how to collect and analyse data.

## Chapter 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

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- To collect and organize previous articles on intercultural sensitivity and teamwork.
- Learn and analyse these articles.

## Chapter 4 CASE STUDY

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- Case university overview.
- To find out which country the students are from.
- To understand the cultural background of the interviewed students.

## Chapter 5 DATA ANALYSIS

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- Findings and conclusions

## Chapter 6 CONCLUSIONS

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- Conclusions based on the study.

## Chapter 7 DISCUSSION

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- Limitations of this study.
- Confirm the validity and reliability of this study.
- Some suggestions for future study.

**Figure 1: Structure of the Thesis**

## 2 RESEARCH TASK

Culture is a shared system, and this system includes norms of behaviour, values, ways to communicate, etc. People in one culture usually have similar customs. When people try to talk, work or make friends with somebody from another culture, they may find it quite interesting, but a lot of misunderstandings happen, because when people do something in their own culture that may have different meanings in other cultures. Finally, it is important to note that there is no “bad” culture; cultures are simply different.

As a part of business and studying, teamwork is extremely important. The idea of teamwork is not only to finish a given project together but also to cooperate and to use one’s skills as a member of a team. Unfortunately, however, many study teams at Lahti University of Applied Sciences simply divide a given project into smaller parts so that each team member can work on one specific part of the project. This is not correct teamwork. In teamwork, it is important to provide constructive feedback even if there are personal conflicts between team members.

### 2.1 Research Question

The efficiency of teamwork has a great influence on a team’s project quality. Cooperation among team members also affects the efficiency of the team. But people from different cultural backgrounds have different understandings. They may not understand each other properly when they are working together. It is therefore important to examine how intercultural sensitivity may affect a team’s quality.

The goal of this study is to evaluate and measure how students from different cultural backgrounds affect teamwork. This study may provide ideas on how to improve the efficiency and quality of teamwork and also how to improve team members’ personal abilities. Furthermore, it will broaden our knowledge of different cultures.

Through this study we can understand:

The definition of concepts:

- a. What is intercultural sensitivity?
- b. What is culture and teamwork?

The research question to be addressed is:

***How does intercultural sensitivity affect teamwork?***

## 2.2 Research Methods

The focus of this study is to evaluate and measure how students who come from different cultural backgrounds impact teamwork. The impact might be positive or negative. Consequently, this study aims to better understand how people coming from different cultural backgrounds behave, communicate and understand various things while working in a team.

Qualitative research aims at a deeper understanding of human behaviour and the reasons behind it. Therefore, qualitative research pays attention to smaller but more concentrated samples to produce a specific case study. So this study will be conducted using qualitative research method. Moreover, the study applies deductive reasoning.



**Figure 2: Process of Deductive Reasoning**

Generally, theories are based on previous studies. Regarding intercultural studies, researchers have proposed questions from various perspectives and, for instance, studied the following: personal intercultural sensitivity,

distinction between genders, and cooperation in multi- and homocultural groups.

By evaluating the collected data, the impact of intercultural sensitivity on teamwork will be understood. The findings of this study may help people improve team efficiency, quality and personal ability.

### 2.3 Research Framework

A clearly expressed research framework can better convey the relationship between the studied objects. A research framework can explain the main objects of study – the key factors, concepts, or variables – and the relationships between them either in graphical or narrative form. (Miles & Huberman 1995, 105-118.)

In this research framework, background information, the previously studies of literature and the case study will support the formation of the research concepts.

The first concept is *cultural background*. A cultural system has a great influence on the behaviour and thought of a person. People from the same cultural system tend to have similar thinking and behaviour patterns. In this study, the cultural background has a crucial impact on the subject of the study.

The second key concept is *personality*. As Figure 3 (see page 12) shows, personal characteristics can also be influenced by culture. Culture can either be a macro or a micro concept. Under the macroscopic cultural system, people also need to live in a microscopic cultural system. These factors will have an impact on a person's personality. And personality also has a very important influence on teamwork.

*Intercultural sensitivity* is the third concept. The main topic of this paper is how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork. Therefore, intercultural sensitivity should be fully interpreted and applied. Based on this, the

researcher will be able to interpret the behaviour patterns of respondents more accurately, so as to obtain answers to the research question.

The last concept is *teamwork*. To truly understand this study, it is necessary to understand what real teamwork is. What are the differences between the concept of teamwork and our understandings? This study will help to better understand this and will give ideas on how to improve the quality and efficiency of teamwork.

By discussing these concepts and studying the obtained data, it should be possible to draw conclusions on how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork.

#### 2.4 Data Collection

The most important part of this study is to gather ideas from people of various cultural backgrounds. The study begins by interviewing students who currently work in a cross-cultural team or someone with experience in this field. The researcher will make an appointment through the Facebook with interviewees.

To ensure the authenticity of the interview, the interviewees' subconscious answer is regarded as the only accepted answer. The more important the problem is, the more correct a subconscious answer is. Therefore, the interviews circumstances will be light-hearted, pressure free and allow free expression. Simultaneously, the interviewees can choose to remain anonymous if they want. Moreover, an unstructured interview allows the interviewee to be comfortable and talk freely (James 2012, 34).

Because cultural background and personal characters to a large extent affect a person's personal intercultural sensitivity, the interviewees will be asked questions related to cultural background and personal circumstances. The respondents' perceptions of team cooperation will also be a very important issue.

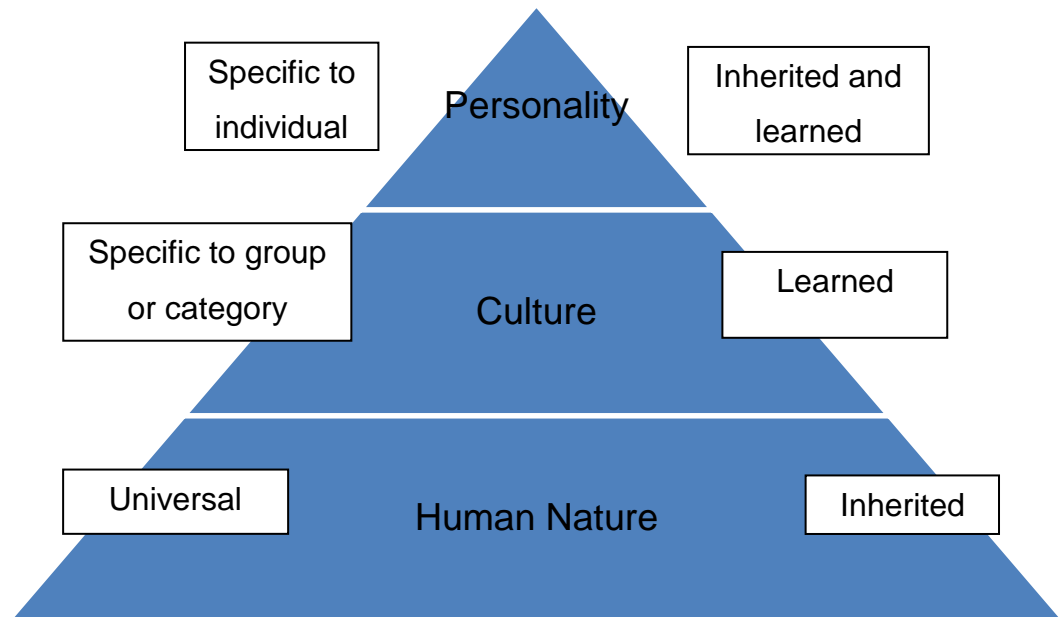
The interview will be conducted both online and face to face. The time span of this interview is restricted to less than 20 minutes. The researcher does not want to allow the interviewee to think too long of a time because the first thought is generally the best representation of a person's true thinking.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

This study presents a case analysis. The object of study must be fully understood before analysing data. This allows to better understand a given case intimately and from various perspectives. Material can be based on interviews, related literature and online sources. Such background information will then be linked to the actual case analysis.

To analyse the collected data, the respondents will be evaluated according to the *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*. There are six stages of intercultural sensitivity. The researcher will draw a conclusion based on the level of each of the respondents, and these conclusions will be linked to the efficiency and quality of the team. Simultaneously, the cultural backgrounds and previous teamwork behaviour of the interviewees will be recorded for further study.

In addition, personal characteristics can also be influenced by culture. Team members' behaviour is affected by their personality and intercultural sensitivity level. Moreover, both of these two elements will affect the team's efficiency.



**Figure 3: Three Levels of Uniqueness in Mental Programming (Hofstede 2010, 6).**

So, in order to better interpret how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork, personal characteristics will also be used as an indicator to investigate and study.

Afterwards, interviewees from the same cultural background will be gathered together as a group, and their views on teamwork will be recorded and analysed. Finally, the researcher will reconstruct those views. These views will be used for comparison and research.

Ultimately, the researcher will be able to draw conclusions based on the analysis of all the data and the various viewpoints.

### 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Intercultural Sensitivity

##### 3.1.1 Globalization

*“Globalization (or globalisation) is the process of international integration arising from the interchange of worldviews, products, ideas and other aspects of culture (Albrow & King 1990, 13).”*

A large number of scholars believe that globalization is an inevitable trend. In the history of human development, people have never stopped exploring and trying to get in touch with the wider world. Globalization has resulted in more common intercultural cooperation than ever before. Sociologists Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King define globalization as follows:

*“...all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society (Albrow & King 1990, 14).”*

The development of science and technology and economy will inevitably lead to the change of the distance between people.

*“Globalization is the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson 1992, 32).”*

On the basis of this view, cooperation among people of different cultural backgrounds will become more frequent. This change is bound to lead to positive and negative results.

*“Among intellectuals in the North, one often hears the claim that global economic integration is leading to rising global inequality— that it benefits the rich more than the poor (Dollar 2005, 96).”*

Without a doubt, globalization does lead to a lot of inequality, but it does give people a new platform for cooperation.



*“We are convinced that globalization is good and it’s good when you do your homework...keep your fundamentals in line on the economy, build up high levels of education, respect rule of law. ...When you do your part, we are convinced that you get the benefit.” (President Vicente Fox of Mexico.)*

*“There is no way you can sustain economic growth without accessing a big and sustained market (President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda).”*

### 3.1.2 The Formation of Culture

E.B. Tylor (1974, 1) defined culture as: "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." The formation of culture is a long process from the lower level to the higher level.

Many studies have noted geography and the mode of production to be important factors affecting the formation of culture.

There are twenty-nine ways proposed by Raimon Panikkar (1991, 252-299) in which cultural change can be brought about. Some of these are:

“Growth, development, evolution, involution, renovation, re-conception, reform, innovation, revivalism, revolution, mutation, progress, diffusion, osmosis, borrowing, eclecticism, syncretism, modernization, indigenization, and transformation.”

### 3.1.3 What is Intercultural Sensitivity

There are many different definitions of intercultural sensitivity. “Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong (Stafford, Bowman, Eking, Hanna, & Lopoies-Defede 1997, 33).” In this study, intercultural sensitivity is defined as the ability to

distinguish corresponding cultural differences and have proper reaction to adapt the differences.

“Cultural diversity can be seen as analogous to biodiversity (Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2007, Article 1).”

People's lives are slowly changing in the process of globalization. People learn each other's language. Multilingualism and the emergence of lingua franca cause people can understand each other in language grade. But people come from different countries, different cultural backgrounds. They often don't understand each other accurately; people of different cultures have different definitions of the same behaviour.

*“Categorizations about identity, even when codified and hardened into clear typologies by processes of colonization, state formation or general modernizing processes, are always full of tensions and contradictions. Sometimes these contradictions are destructive, but they can also be creative and positive. (Paul 2015, 176.)”*

In intercultural communication, how people communicate in order to ensure mutual understanding and respect is an urgent problem to be solved.

If people cannot change the cognition and behaviour of others or themselves, knowing how to control or reduce cultural conflict is also one of high level manifestations of intercultural sensitivity.

Cultural identity will inevitably affect the intercultural sensitivity of individuals. As everyone knows, cultural identity is belonging to a group of identity or sense of belonging. Cultural identity is individual's characteristic, and it is also characteristic of the same group of members sharing the same cultural identity (Ennaji 2005, 19-23).

#### 3.1.4 Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Milton J. Bennett is a founding director and CEO of the Intercultural Development Research Institute. The Developmental Model of Intercultural

Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993), also called Bennett Scale, was created by him.

In general, ethnocentric orientations are ways of ignoring cultural difference, even denying the differences, or by believing that there is no difference. On the other hand, ethno relative worldviews are ways of believing that there are cultural differences, and then accept it, adapt it and maybe be a part of it. (Bennett 1993, 5)

Denial→Defence Reversal→Minimization→Acceptance→Adaptation→Integration

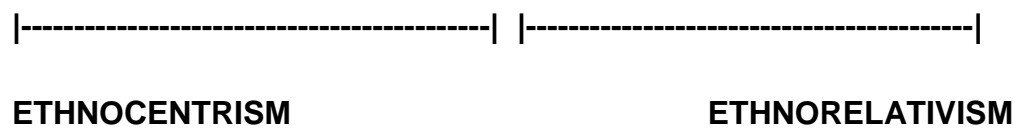


Figure 4: Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

### Definition of Each Stage of Intercultural Sensitivity

#### 1. DENIAL OF DIFFERENCE

People at this stage are unable to recognize cultural differences and experiences. They believe that their culture is the orthodox culture; other cultures are at the edge of the world. Such people are often arrogant and ignorant. (Bennett 1993, 7.)

In some cases, people at this stage might dehumanize people who from other cultural background. They think that different behaviour is unacceptable and debased. (Bennett 1993, 7.)

“...assuming that different behaviour is a deficiency in intelligence or personality (Bennett 1993, 7).”

According to Bennett, at this stage, people usually say:

- “You are wrong, let us do this in my way.”
- “As long as we all speak the same language, there’s no problem.”

## 2. DEFENCE AGAINST DIFFERENCE

Usually people who are in this stage, they can be aware of some cultural differences, but they assume that their culture is the best one and they are not interested in understanding other cultures (Bennett 1993, 9).

“They feel ‘under siege’ by people that they stereotype in simplistic and negative ways, protecting themselves with a hardened boundary between themselves and the others (Bennett 1993, 9).”

According to Bennett, at this stage, people usually say:

- “My culture should be a model for the rest of the world.”
- “Why don’t these people speak my language?”

## 3. MINIMIZATION OF DIFFERENCE

“The predominant experience of minimization is that of having ‘arrived’ at intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1993, 13).”

At this stage, people are probably no longer ethnocentric. They think people are all the same. But these people tend to ignore the impact of culture on a person. (Bennett 1993, 13.)

According to Bennett, at this stage, people usually say:

- “We are all same, we love the same thing.”
- “Customs differ, of course, but when you really get to know them they’re pretty much like us.”

## 4. ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE

At this stage, people would like to try to understand cultural differences (Bennett 1993, 16).

“They accept that all behaviors and values, including their own, exist

in distinctive cultural contexts and that patterns of behaviors and values can be discerned within each context (Bennett 1993, 17).”

According to Bennett, at this stage, people usually say:

- “The more difference the better – it is boring if everyone is the same.”
- “You will have a better life if you know more cultures.”

## 5. ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENCE

People can, through study or communication, get to know much more about this world and then they can find why there are so many cultural differences (Bennett 1993, 21).

According to Bennett, at this stage, people usually say:

- “I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways.”
- “I’m beginning to feel like a member of this culture.”

## 6. INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENCE

People at this stage are able to shift from one culture to another easily. People have no communication barriers at this stage. (Bennett 1993, 25.)

According to Bennett, at this stage, people usually say:

- “Whatever the situation, I can usually look at it from a variety of cultural points of view.”
- “I truly enjoy participating fully in both of my cultures.”

The research shows that intercultural sensitivity is an attitude. It affects the ability of interact with people of different cultures. The ability can be measured, and it can also be improved. (Bhawuk & Brislin 1992, 413-436.)

“The DMIS constitutes a progression of worldview ‘orientations toward cultural difference’ that comprise the potential for increasingly more sophisticated inter cultural experiences (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003).”

This framework (DMIS) is helpful when trying to understand the various stages of intercultural sensitivity.

## 3.2 Personality

### 3.2.1 The Influence of Culture on the Individual

“The individual self is formed within culture, and on the basis of shared cultural resources (Couldry 2000, 44).”

It is obvious that the big cultural system influences individual behaviour and thought. The researcher found that when the students of Lahti University of Applied Sciences want to cooperate with others to do a group work, the primary choice factor is “same country”. People from the same country usually have the same cultural background, and there are not many obstacles in their communication. However, there are still many problems in their cooperation. Because of that, the macroscopic cultural system does not specifically show the characteristics of culture. Under the macroscopic cultural system, microscopic culture is also developing.

Microscopic culture contains many elements: education background, family, the influence of friends around, worldview, values, etc. The elements of microscopic cultures define each person.

In teamwork, there is no doubt that it will produce a unique group culture.

Microscopic culture mainly affects small and particular groups. Those groups usually have their own customs, rules, etc. There are different behaviour between those particular groups and the macro group. (David McCurdy 2004, 20.)

“A micro culture depends on the smallest units of organisation – dyads, groups, or local communities – as opposed to the broader subcultures of race or class, and the wider national/global culture, compared to which they tend also to be more short-lived, as well as voluntarily chosen (Ballantine & Roberts 2011, 72 & 93).”

### 3.2.2 The Performance of Gender Differences in Culture

Men are different from women in both physiological functioning and psychological functioning (Richardson 1997, 3).

In the cultures of different countries, genders are treated in different ways. In some Asian cultures, females are considered to be protected. The source of this ideology is the ancient hunting and farming activities. As time goes on, cultures change, but traditional culture still has an impact on groups. Thus the impact on individuals is self-evident. When such an ideology affects teamwork, the ways in which team members cooperate and behave will change.

Lillian Glass (1992) affirms that there are at least four descriptions of differences, both verbal and nonverbal: body language, facial expression, speech patterns and behaviours.

#### **Body Language:**

Men	Women
They take up more physical space when sitting or standing, with arms and legs stretched out away from their body.	They take up less physical space, sitting with arms and legs toward their body.
They gesture away from the body.	They gesture toward the body.
They assume more reclined positions when sitting and lean	They assume more forward positions when sitting and lean

backward when listening.	forward when listening.
They are not as sensitive to the communication cues of others.	They have greater sensitivity and acuity toward other people's nonverbal communication cues.

**Table 1: Body Language Differences (Lillian Glass, 1992)**

**Facial Expression:**

Men	Women
They tend to cock their head to the side and look at the other person from an angle when listening.	They tend to look at the other person directly facing them with their head and eyes facing forward when listening.
They provide fewer facial expressions in feedback and fewer reactions.	They provide more facial expressions and more reactions.
They tend to display frowning and squinting when listening.	They display smiling and head-nodding when listening.
They stare more in negative interaction.	They lower their eyes more to avert gaze in negative interaction.

**Table 2: Facial Expressions Differences (Lillian Glass, 1992)**

**Speech Patterns:**

Men	Women
They speak in a louder voice.	They speak in a softer voice.
They disclose less personal information about themselves.	They disclose more personal information about themselves.



**Table 3: Speech Patterns Differences (Lillian Glass, 1992)****Behaviour:**

Men	Women
They try to solve problems and troubles.	They try to match troubles by relating similar negative experiences.
They have a more analytical approach to problems.	They have a more emotional approach to problems.

**Table 4: Behaviour Differences (Lillian Glass, 1992)**

### 3.3 Teamwork

#### 3.3.1 The Expression Form of Teamwork

In many sports, for example in basketball, the team manager occasionally requires an ordinary player to replace a star-player. In the NBA finals, people often see a team winning a game without a star-player. This is because the team plays as one unit, and they are familiar with each other and trust each other. More importantly, each player knows his own and other players' responsibilities.

“Teams that function well can indeed achieve a level of synergy and agility that never could be reprogrammed by organization planners or enforced by external managers (Hackman 2007, 248).”

The researcher found out that, when students of Lahti University of Applied Sciences work in groups, they normally choose to divide the whole work to several parts, and each one of them would pick one part to do individually. Then, they combine their work to have a final result. This is definitely not teamwork, and the efficiency of this mode of operation is extremely low. Moreover, so is usually the quality of work.

Teamwork is extremely important in many different areas. If a team works well together, every team member tries their best in any situation.

Cooperation and communication are very important elements. Also, it is quite important to provide some constructive feedback even if there are some personal conflicts between individuals.

If there are poor communicators in a team, people may often feel confused or misunderstood. Intercultural sensitivity is one of the key factors influencing one's ability to communicate well.

### 3.3.2 Characteristics of Effective Teamwork

The focus of the study is to evaluate and measure how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork. In order to achieve the goal of improving the quality and efficiency of intercultural cooperation through this study, it is good to know what the characteristics of good teamwork habits are.

Through the study of their theories, hereinafter are some of the common views of the scholars:

- Adequate communication:

Communication with the rest of team members is one of the hallmarks of your participation in the work. Each team member should be able to share their ideas, questions and opinions.

Adequate communication makes the team more dynamic. (Hackman 2007, 251.)

- Great leadership:

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way (Maxwell 1998, 14)."

Team leader is in charge of the team's direction and decision-making. The leader carries the heavy responsibility. And the team cooperation, team enthusiasm and other issues are closely related to the team leader.

- Efficient collaboration:

For a team to work, each one of the team members must know their responsibilities, skills, position, etc. An efficient team can play the true ability of each team member. A team does not have extra team member, only each team member link to each other is to be considered real team cooperation.

- Common goal:

Effective goals should be S.M.A.R.T.—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound (Drucker 1954, 32).

One of the shortcuts to improving the efficiency and quality of teamwork is to work as a unit. This should be based on the team members have a common goal. If each member's goal is different, then the direction of each person is different. This will be difficult to achieve the purpose of collaborative.

- Respect and trust:

Trust and respect is especially important parts of building a successful team. When the team members trust each other, people can be more focused on their own work. The quality of cooperation will be increased.

In an intercultural team, how do people trust and respect each other is related to the stages of intercultural sensitivity.

## 4 CASE STUDY

### 4.1 Overview of Lahti University of Applied Sciences

The case is selected from the Lahti University of Applied Sciences.

Lahti University of Applied Sciences receives many international students each year. Therefore, intercultural communication in this university is particularly prevalent. These international students are mainly in three majors: Business Information Technology, International Business and Nursing.

As Lahti UAS is based in Finland, Finnish students account for the majority of all students. So the culture of this university is influenced primarily by the macroscopic culture of Finland.

Russian, Vietnamese and Chinese are the majority cultural groups among international students. Meanwhile, there are exchange students from Spain, Korea, Italy, Japan, etc. Under this multicultural system, intercultural communication becomes important.

Teacher lecturers pay great attention to the intercultural communication between students at this university. The intercultural group are required occasionally by teachers, sometimes, same cultural background's students are not allowed to be in the same team. That makes the studying environment very international. But the problem of this kind of cooperation is often neglected by people.

### 4.2 Current Situation in Team Cooperation

Although in this intercultural learning atmosphere, a lot of students still limit themselves to their own cultural circle. This does not mean they are willing to do so, but because the cultural gap is an important factor affecting the communication of people. And if this situation maps to the teamwork, it will be a lack of communication between team members.

As one of the students at Lahti University of Applied Sciences, the researcher is studying Business Information Technology (BIT) currently. Therefore, the researcher found that some students did not actively participate in intercultural teamwork. Even if they are in an intercultural team, they do not practice a favourable communication. Teamwork without communication is inefficient.

According to Milton J. Bennett's theory, each one of people is in a different stage of intercultural sensitivity. After people understand how intercultural sensitivity affects communication, people will better interpret this research question:

How does intercultural sensitivity affect teamwork?

## 5 DATA ANALYSIS

The focus of this study is to evaluate and measure how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork. As the researcher previously noted, the case is selected from the Lahti University of Applied Sciences (Finland). And Russian, Vietnamese and Chinese students are the majority cultural group in the international students. In this investigation, a total of ten students participated in the interview. Two students are Russian, two students are Chinese, two students are Vietnamese, two students are Finnish, one student is Korean, and the last student is British.

And through the literature review, each person is in a same or different stage of intercultural sensitivity. Based on the results of the interview, each interviewee's answers were classified by the researcher, thus obtained the stage of each person.

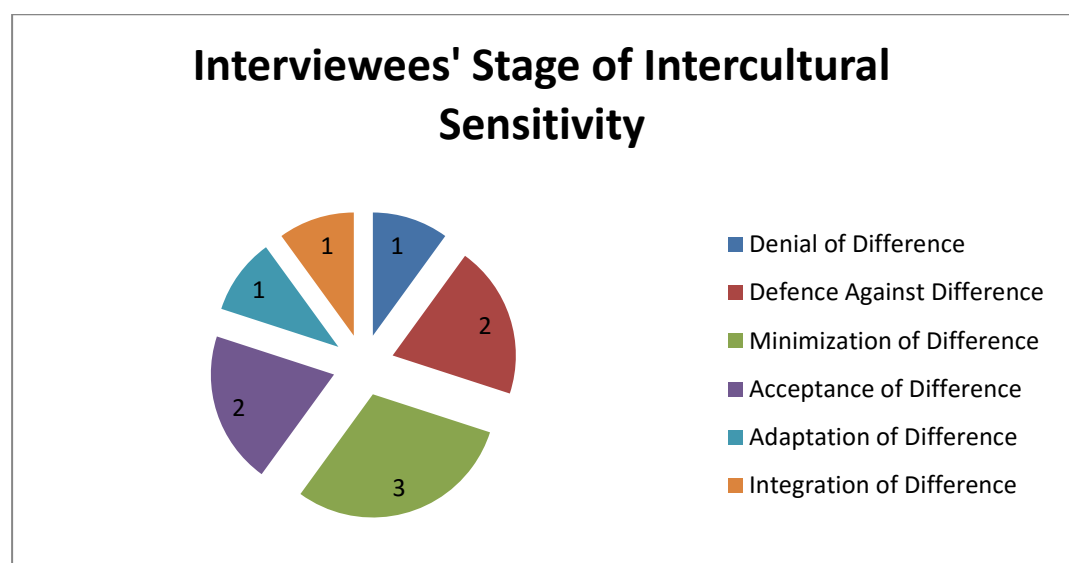
Name	Gender	Nationality	Stage	Opinions
V1	Male	Vietnam	DEFENCE AGAINST DIFFERENCE	"I do not pay attention to the ethnic composition. I can correct others If they did somethings wrong."
V2	Male	Vietnam	ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE	"We doing things in different way, but I am okay with it."
CN1	Female	China	MINIMIZATION OF DIFFERENCE	"Maybe we have showed a lot of differences. But people are basically the same."
CN2	Female	China	DEFENCE AGAINST DIFFERENCE	"To communicate with people from different cultures makes feel strange. Sometimes I want to show the real me to them, but it is so hard. I do not think they can understand me."
FI1	Male	Finland	MINIMIZATION OF DIFFERENCE	"Sometimes they understand, sometimes they do not. But I believe that we will understand each other eventually."
FI2	Female	Finland	DENIAL OF DIFFERENCE	"We are in Finland, so I think people should learn how to do things like Finns."

R1	Male	Russia	ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENCE	"I like to communicate with people of different cultures. Sometimes I feel like I am one of them. That is interesting."
R2	Female	Russia	MINIMIZATION OF DIFFERENCE	"I do not think people are different, maybe sometimes we have some different thinking. But we are like each other."
K1	Male	Korea	ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE	"Like I am different from you, people are never same. That is the most interesting part."
B1	Male	Britain	INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENCE	"I believe I can be anyone of them, I do not feel awkward with them. And I can totally understand them."

**Table 5: Interviewees' Different Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity**

The rating is obtained through the entire interview. And the most important quotation was recorded by researchers. Those quotations are not the interviewees' complete original word. More details will appear in the following.

In order to obtain the valid and reliable findings, each interviewee were asked the exactly same questions. Additional one or two different questions were asked depending on the different circumstances of the interview. Interviewees were divided into the following category of intercultural sensitivity.



**Table 6: Interviewees' Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity**

Through this form, people can clearly see that the majority of interviewees are in the defence, minimization and acceptance stage of intercultural sensitivity. Through the distribution of the data, it also shows that student's stage of intercultural sensitivity is generally low.

And in the process of the interviews, the researcher found that most of the interviewees have no concept about what is intercultural sensitivity.

Name:	Point of View
CN1	"Maybe at first we will be different, but slowly, we will find that people are the same." "The best way to communicate is to seek common ground and ignore differences."
F11	"But I believe that we will understand each other eventually."
R2	"In the process of cooperation, we do have some disputes, but I do not think it is caused by different cultures."
V1	"I pay attention to the skillset of each member of the group, and to how those skillsets can be used to tackle the problems the group needs to solve."

**Table 7: Understandings of Intercultural Sensitivity**

Through interviews with the students mentioned in the above table, almost all students who are in the minimization stage believe that the minimization stage is the best stage of intercultural sensitivity. As CN1 mentioned, the best way to communicate is to seek common ground and ignore differences. And at this stage people generally believe that cultural differences will not cause too much impact on the teamwork. But differences are subsistent. During the interview, CN2 mentioned that she does not like the way people talk about the problems, and sometimes people of other cultural backgrounds cannot understand her when she expresses her depression. And a step further; if people like V1, only pay attention to the skillset of each member of the group, maybe a lot of obstacles will appear in the team cooperation, people will have resistance and disgust.

Many of the interviewees believe that cultural differences and intercultural sensitivity have no effect on the quality and efficiency of teamwork. However, through the collection of data, people will find that intercultural



sensitivity effectively affect the team cooperation. People just sometimes attribute this effect to other reasons, like personal ability and personality. And sometimes, people just choose to ignore these differences.

Concerning the question:

What do you think of those factors that would be important to you in an intercultural group? Why?

- a. Communication and feedback
- b. Use of skills
- c. Team leadership
- d. Knowledge sharing
- e. Correct strategy
- f. Implementation capacity
- g. Rules

Every interviewee chose “a” and “b” as the most important factors of an intercultural group. According to the literature review, the cultural background has a significant impact on the way of communication. And intercultural sensitivity affects the communication among people with different cultural backgrounds. So, “communication”, one of the most important factors of intercultural group, effectively affects the quality and efficiency of teamwork.

**F12:**

“They often did something that not useful, and make some inadvisable decision. That makes our team very inefficient.”

“The way they do things is weird occasionally, I want to give them some advices, but they do not seem to accept it, so it is quite difficult to cooperate with them.”

“We communicate more smoothly, and I do not feel there are so many obstacles.”

**CN2:**

“I am not enjoying working in an intercultural team because it’s maybe a new feeling to me and I need to get used to it.”

“Sometimes I am nervous. Sometimes I get tired of speaking English as well as thinking

that English could not make others completely understand me, which will results in less power of me in intercultural group.”

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“It is more like working with my friends, and I do not feel afraid at all, we can talk freely and exchange of views, maybe it is because we are comes from the same country. Honestly speaking, it is much easier to me to work with people who come from the same country.”

**R2:**

“I think people are generally the same, maybe sometimes people have some different thinking, but it is not a big impact on me, I just know what I have to do.”

“I think we have a smooth communication in our team, there is no pressure.”

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“There are no many differences between intercultural team and same cultural team, sometime we do have some arguments, but I think it is very normal. We just need a same goal. That is all.”

**V2:**

“Because I am an Asian that is living, working and studying in Europe. I need to get used to the differences.”

“I do not feel nervous when I communicate with them, like almost never, we doing things in different way, but I am okay with it.”

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“Of course it is much easier to working with Vietnamese; we do not have much different opinions about how to do things. It is totally okay to work in an intercultural team too, but I do can feel the differences. But I can deal with it.”

**R1:**

“I like to communicate with people of different cultures. Sometimes I feel like I am one of them. That is interesting.”

“I am very willing to listen to other people's ideas and respect them. Though sometimes I can't understand other people's behaviour at once. But I'll think of a way to make us understand each other.”

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“To me, it is kind of boring to work in an Identical-Cultural group, because I am in an international class, I am willing to work with different people. That is really fun to me; I feel I can get more power when I am working with them.”

**B1:**

"I do not like some people usually hold an ethnocentric assumption that certain behaviours exclusive to certain cultures are unhelpfully different."

"The purpose of group work is to solicit the participation of as many brains as possible, and communication and the willingness to share are the means to do so. A good strategy allows for a better, smoother work."

"It's exactly the same to me."

**Table 8: Different Stages of People's Awareness of Teamwork**

In this table, the lines above are the views about intercultural group; the lines below are the views about identical-cultural group.

Through the above table, obvious different thoughts appear in interviewees of different stage of intercultural sensitivity. In the Denial stage, the interviewee refuses to accept other forms of culture. This ideology makes it difficult for her to accept other people's different ways of behaviour. And her behaviour has a negative impact on the quality and efficiency of the team. By comparing her viewpoint of intercultural teams and her viewpoint of identical-cultural team, the low stage of intercultural sensitivity is considered to have a negative impact on team cooperation.

And through the study of CN2's ideology, people who are in the second stage of intercultural sensitivity tend to influence themselves in teamwork. They usually feel uncomfortable in an intercultural team. Although this situation does not directly affect the teamwork, limited personal ability and communication skills will also be an obstacle to teamwork. But the negative effect is obvious smaller than in the first stage.

People in the third and the fourth stages are trying to adapt and accept the diversities of different cultures. While excluding other factors, they have no significant positive or negative effect on team work. But they do realize that there are differences. Their behaviours will not be a hindrance to teamwork and communication; on the contrary, they are more able to learn things through teamwork.

By comparing R2 and V2's viewpoints, a higher stage of intercultural sensitivity will not directly meliorate people's feelings of communication with people of different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural sensitivity has more impact on people's ideologies and behaviours.

People who are in the fifth stage of intercultural sensitivity clearly prefer to work and study in an intercultural environment. They are often the catalysts for teamwork which are able to promote team communication and improve work enthusiasm. They can more easily become the tacit cooperation object and a close friend with other team members.

Working with a few close friends, people you respect. And that would be a better experience than working with strangers. Through these inferences, the adaptation to difference stage has a very positive impact on teamwork.

But through the research on B1's viewpoint, the researcher found that people who are in the last stage of intercultural sensitivity do not have obvious positive or negative impact on teamwork. Their behaviours are usually not different from those of others. And their performance in the identical-culture team and the performance in the intercultural team are also no significant differences. But even so, for those who are in this stage, their study and work will be much more convenient.

In the study, the performance of gender differences in culture has not been perfectly studied. Because through the interviews with people of different cultural backgrounds cannot obtain a single definition of the differences between men and women. And from the viewpoints given by the interviewees did not find many differences between men and women caused by culture.

But there are several quotations from the interviewees can cursory describe what those differences in culture between men and women are.

**F11:**

Because there are biological differences regarding to how both sexes' bodies and their

internal workings differ.

There were some problems while we are working together. It quite hard to describe. But I know there was something different. I worked with some Asian girls, they seem not active, and sometimes I feel like they are counting on you, even it is their job.

**R1:**

Different, of course. But I do not think there are many differences about how they work.

It is good experience. We are different. Somehow it is very funny while we work together.

**Table 9: The Performance of Gender Differences in Culture**

By comparing F11 and R1's viewpoints, people who are in a higher stage of intercultural sensitivity also have stronger adaptability to different genders.

Based on the study, it appears that intercultural sensitivity can be improved. In order to make intercultural cooperation more successful, people should try to comprehend how to respect other cultures.

### **Suggestions:**

- Have an open mind: Try to understand and accept what other people believe in. When you find that something you dislike or do not understand, do not judge it quickly; and then take a closer look. Try not to make yourself as the centre.
- Study religion: Different areas have different religions. That could be one of the explanations of why there are so many kinds of different cultures. Therefore, do not be afraid to look at other people's faith. You do not have to change your own faith or ideology; that also means you cannot ask others to change their faith or ideology. Part of culture comes from religion. Therefore, if you want to understand different people and be better at teamwork, study religion.
- Learn history: This is the most important step. If you know nothing about one country's history, you will never understand their culture! Don't deprive yourself of study histories.

- Taste new dishes: Do not hesitate to have a dinner party. This is the best way to get to know each other at the beginning. People can easily find common ground at a dinner party. Just enjoy different kinds of foods.
- Talk to people: This aims to connect people. When people talk, they will eventually find a common way to communicate.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the literature review introduced in this study, intercultural sensitivity can be divided into six stages: Denial of difference, defence against difference, minimization of difference, acceptance of difference, adaptation to difference and integration of difference. Intercultural sensitivity affects people's ideologies and behaviours.

With the acceleration of internationalization, intercultural cooperation has become a trend. A team often includes people from different cultural backgrounds. Successful teamwork has the following characteristics: Adequate communication, great leadership, efficient collaboration, common goal, respect and trust, etc. Based on the interviews, "adequate communication" is considered to be one of the most important factors of teamwork.

The aim of this study was to evaluate and measure how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork. Because there are many international students are studying in Lahti University of Applied Sciences, the students of Lahti University of Applied Sciences were selected as the case example.

The case study shows that the ideology and behaviour of each person in the different stages of intercultural sensitivity differs. Based on the data, the impact of intercultural sensitivity on teamwork is as follows:

The first stage of intercultural sensitivity is considered to have a negative impact on teamwork. The second stage of intercultural sensitivity also has a negative impact on teamwork, but this negative impact is smaller than the first stage's. In each stage, the influence of intercultural sensitivity on teamwork is more and more positive. But in the last stage, personal impact on the team is smaller. People who are in the last stage have a more positive impact on themselves.

Intercultural sensitivity has more impact on people's ideologies and behaviours; and ideologies and behaviours have significant impact on people's communication skills. "Communication" as one of the most

important factors of teamwork affects the efficiency and quality of teamwork. But there are a lot of factors that also could influence the teamwork. Such as personal ability, responsibility, benefit, team rules, etc.



## 7 DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Limitations

The focus of this study was to evaluate and measure how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork; the other factors that could affect intercultural cooperation are not being studied in depth.

Because of the limited resources, not every stage of intercultural sensitivity of people was studied successfully. In this intercultural era, people's intercultural sensitivity is generally at an intermediate level. This was an obstacle in this study.

Another limitation is that it is impossible to study all cultures. That means there is an irreparable flaw in the study. Further studies could aim to confirm the results.

However, despite these limitations, the results of this study may still serve as a good reference in this field.

### 7.2 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability have a great influence on the reference value of a study.

The case university is one of educational institutions in Finland. There are plenty of international students at the case university; they study together, work together, and sometimes live together. That makes the intercultural atmosphere great. This makes the present study credible.

“Validity is also dependent on the measurement measuring what it was designed to measure and not something else instead (Bernstein 2009).”

The interviewees are from different cultural backgrounds and they have diverse personalities. Each one of the interviewees has been studied precisely. The results obtained in the interviews are similar to what the

researcher has observed during his studies and in working life. Finally, each of the interviewees was cooperative.

### 7.3 Suggestions for Future Study

The focus of the study was to evaluate and measure how intercultural sensitivity affects teamwork. The aim was to improve the efficiency and quality of teamwork, and reduce the negative impact of intercultural sensitivity on teamwork.

The study did not test all the factors that could affect intercultural team cooperation. Moreover, further studies could examine more factors concerning teamwork or intercultural teamwork. For instance, personal ability, responsibility, benefit, team rules, etc. could be considered.

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## APPENDICES

### ***Interview Sheet***

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Topic: Intercultural Sensitivity and Teamwork

Author: Muxing Liu

Date of Interview:

Interviewee's Position:

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Theme: Personal Background

1. Are you working in an intercultural group at present? Or do you have any experience in this field?
  2. Which country are you come from? Could you please give a brief introduction to the cooperation habit of your country?
  3. Are you able to play all your power in the intercultural group? Why?
- 

Theme: Personal Intercultural Sensitivity

2. What position do you normally do in group collaboration? Why?
3. What do you think of those factors that would be important to you in an intercultural group? Why?
  - a. Communication and feedback
  - b. Use of skills
  - c. Team leadership
  - d. Knowledge sharing
  - e. Correct strategy
  - f. Implementation capacity
  - g. Respect and trust

4. How do you perceive other cultures?
  5. Do you feel comfortable when you are working in an intercultural group? Do you enjoy it or you think people from other cultures are narrow-minded? You can choose the middle level, but you need to tell me which side you prefer.
  6. Would you be interested in learning about other people's culture?
  7. How often do you feel nervous in an intercultural group? How do you solve the problem?
- 

Theme: Distinction between Different Genders

1. Do you think there are differences between men and women? Why? (Thinking Level).
  2. How to deal with the differences between men and women in the culture of your country?
- 

Theme: Intercultural Group Cooperation

1. What is the biggest challenge you face in intercultural teamwork? Why?
2. In your intercultural team working experience, how do you assign a project? Do you think that is a good way?
3. What will you do when you disagree with rest of you team members? Are they feeling comfortable with your practice?
4. What are the benefits of intercultural teamwork of your opinion?
5. Will you be involved in a similar intercultural team? Why?

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Theme: Identical-Cultural Group Cooperation

1. What are the differences between intercultural team cooperation and identical cultural cooperation? Which one do you prefer? Why?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in an identical culture group?

Additional questions are not recorded.

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