COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK CULTURE IN MULTICULTURAL COMPANIES: THE CASE OF DSV IN BELGIUM

Julia Morawska[1*]

[1] WSB Merito University in Wrocław Branch in Opole, Faculty of Management, Poland

Abstract: In the contemporary world, organizations increasingly operate across borders due to globalization, which requires the management of multicultural teams. People managing international teams face challenges that require them to deal with cultural differences, language barriers, and various work practices while achieving organizational goals. Intercultural team management involves the art of leading diverse teams from varied cultural backgrounds towards common goals. It requires proficiency in understanding, respecting, and leveraging cultural differences to foster collaboration and innovation. Effective intercultural team management creates an environment where diverse perspectives harmonize to drive success in a globalized landscape. The primary aim of this article is to explore and analyze selected aspects of cross-cultural management within an international business context, using the case of DSV in Belgium as an example, with a special focus on how cultural differences, language barriers, and varying work practices influence the management of multicultural teams. The study found that effective cross-cultural management at DSV in Belgium involves adapting leadership styles and communication strategies to align with the cultural diversity of the workforce, which enhances team collaboration and overall organizational performance.

Keywords: communication, cross-cultural management, effective leadership, multicultural team, language barriers

JEL Classification: M12, M14, M50

[1] Julia Morawska, MSc, Augustyna Kośnego 72, 45-372 Opole, Poland, juliamoa854@gmail.com, orcid.org/0009-0002-7458-534X
[*] Corresponding author: Julia Morawska, juliamoa854@gmail.com

Introduction

In the realm of international management, understanding and navigating diverse cultures is crucial. The dynamic interplay between culture and business practices shapes the success and effectiveness of organizations operating on a global scale but not only. Culture is not confined to mere traditions or customs; it encompasses a complex web of beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors that profoundly influence how individuals and businesses operate, communicate, and collaborate. In this context, exploring the role of culture in international management becomes imperative and forms the primary objective of the article.

The research question was as stated: How do intercultural communication and feedback culture function in logistics companies such as DSV, and what impact do they have on the operational efficiency of these firms? The article will begin with a detailed literature review, providing the theoretical background and context for the study. Next, the research methodology will be thoroughly explained, covering the design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used in the study. Following this, the results of the research will be presented in detail. Finally, the article will conclude with a discussion that compares the findings with those of other researchers who have explored similar topics, placing the study within the wider academic conversation.

Literature review

Cross-cultural management is a critical field of study that examines the influence of cultural differences on management practices within multinational organizations. It encompasses an understanding of how cultural backgrounds affect communication, leadership styles, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution within a global workforce. As globalization continues to advance, the ability to effectively manage cross-cultural teams has become a vital competency for managers and organizations striving to succeed in the international marketplace (Thomas & Peterson, 2017).

The study of cross-cultural management is underpinned by several key theories and models that examine the complexities of managing a diverse workforce. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is among the most referenced frameworks in this area. Hofstede identified six dimensions of national culture – power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation vs. short-term normative orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint – which influence organizational behavior. These dimensions offer a systematic approach to understanding cultural differences and their implications for management practices (Hofstede et al., 2010; Grosskopf, 2021). Similarly, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Seven Dimensions of Culture (1997) provide insights into how cultural values shape organizational behavior, highlighting dimensions such as universalism vs. particularism, individualism vs. communitarianism, and neutral vs. affective relationships, which emphasize different cultural approaches to business and management (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2011). Additionally, the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) project, initiated by House

et al. (2004), extends Hofstede's work by examining the impact of culture on leadership effectiveness across various countries, adding more context-specific variables and offering a nuanced understanding of cross-cultural leadership (House et al., 2004).

Managing cultural differences in multinational organizations presents several challenges, including communication barriers, varying leadership expectations, and different approaches to conflict resolution. Communication, a critical aspect of management, is significantly influenced by cultural norms. High-context cultures, such as Japan and China, rely heavily on implicit communication and non-verbal cues, while low-context cultures, like Germany and the United States, prefer explicit and direct communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Misunderstandings can easily arise when managers are unaware of these differences, leading to conflicts and reduced organizational effectiveness (Nwankwo et al., 2024). Leadership styles also vary across cultures. For example, in high power distance cultures, such as Belgium and France, hierarchical leadership is often accepted and expected, whereas, in low power distance cultures like Denmark and Sweden, participative and egalitarian leadership is more common (Hofstede et al., 2010). Managers in multinational companies must adapt their leadership styles to align with the cultural expectations of their employees to ensure effective team management (Meyer, 2014; Haque, 2021). Conflict resolution is another area where cultural differences have significant implications. Individualistic cultures, such as the United States, may prefer direct confrontation and assertiveness in resolving disputes, while collectivistic cultures, like Japan, tend to favor indirect approaches and seek harmony over open conflict (Ting-Toomey, 2007). Understanding these differences is crucial for managers to navigate conflicts in a culturally sensitive manner (Thomas & Peterson, 2017).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies had to swiftly adapt to strict lockdowns that extended over several weeks, creating unprecedented challenges for leadership. These extraordinary circumstances underscored the critical importance of effective team management and its lasting influence on the entire workforce. In times of uncertainty, strong leadership becomes essential in steering teams through difficult periods. Leadership behavior, team effectiveness, and technological adaptability all play key roles in fostering work engagement, which in turn drives proficiency, adaptability, and proactivity (Koekemoer et al., 2021). What is more, leadership behavior is viewed as a form of supervisory support, while team effectiveness stems from collaboration among colleagues. Together, these factors form social support, combining managerial guidance and peer cooperation, both of which are vital for employee engagement (Koekemoer et al., 2021).

Belgium presents a unique context for cross-cultural management because of its diverse cultural landscape. The country is characterized by a complex mix of linguistic communities – Dutch-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia, and the German-speaking minority – and significant regional cultural differences (Dewulf, 2011). This cultural diversity poses unique challenges for organizations operating in Belgium, particularly multinational companies like DSV. In Belgium, the cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede and others manifest in various ways. For example, Belgium scores relatively high on the uncertainty avoidance dimension, indicating a preference for structured environments and clear rules (Hofstede et al., 2010).

This cultural trait can influence how managers approach decision-making and risk management within Belgian teams (Cools & Van den Broeck, 2007). Additionally, the country's high score on power distance suggests a more hierarchical organizational structure, where authority and leadership are often concentrated at the top (Hofstede et al., 2010). The linguistic diversity in Belgium also impacts cross-cultural communication within organizations. Language barriers can create misunderstandings and hinder effective collaboration among employees from different linguistic backgrounds (Janssens et al., 2004). Consequently, companies operating in Belgium must adopt strategies to facilitate communication across language groups and foster a culture of inclusion (Dewulf, 2011).

DSV, a global transport and logistics company, operates in a highly multicultural environment, making cross-cultural management a critical aspect of its operations in Belgium. The company's ability to navigate the cultural complexities of the Belgian market is crucial for its success in the region. DSV's approach to cross-cultural management involves understanding the local cultural context, adapting its management practices to align with Belgian cultural norms, and leveraging the cultural diversity of its workforce to enhance organizational performance. The case of DSV in Belgium highlights several key aspects of cross-cultural management, including the importance of cultural awareness, the need for flexible leadership styles, and the role of effective communication in managing a diverse workforce (Thomas & Peterson, 2017; Meyer, 2014).

In conclusion, the literature on cross-cultural management underscores the importance of cultural awareness and adaptability in managing diverse teams within multinational organizations. Theoretical frameworks such as Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Seven Dimensions of Culture, and the GLOBE project provide valuable insights into how cultural differences influence management practices. In the context of Belgium, cultural diversity and linguistic complexity present unique challenges for companies like DSV. Addressing these challenges through effective cross-cultural management strategies is essential to achieve organizational success in Belgium's multicultural environment (Thomas & Peterson, 2017; Dewulf, 2011). As the reviewed studies indicate, most research on intercultural communication in companies focuses on general management issues rather than specific industries like logistics. There is a lack of detailed analysis on how communication and feedback culture operate in logistics companies, such as DSV, and how different cultures impact operational efficiency.

Research methods

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Quantitative data offers objective measurement, while qualitative insights allow for in-depth context and perspectives, enhancing the overall validity of the findings.

The survey, developed independently by the author in three languages – Dutch, English, and Polish – was designed without using data from the quantitative research as the responses remained unknown until the completion of the interviews and

survey. It consisted of open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, but primarily focused on ordinal scale questions, ranging from 1 to 5. The author, in collaboration with one of the managers of DSV, aimed to gather key insights for the warehouse regarding the effectiveness of communication within the department. The questions were intentionally tailored to address the specific needs of the warehouse.

A survey was carried out, targeting warehouse employees from various departments in the Ghent warehouse. The main goal of this study was to understand detailed opinions about communication at DSV and their preferences. Primary data was collected from departments including Human Resources, IT, Customer Service, Warehouse Operations, Management, the Quality team, the Stock team, and Business Support. The primary data was gathered using Sphinx software. Secondary data was sourced from statistical portals, books, published research, and websites. To examine preferences regarding communication at DSV, a survey was created on the sphinxdeclic.com website and conducted among the departments from June 3rd to September 5th, 2023. A total of 60 responses were gathered. The questionnaire consisted of up to 30 straightforward questions divided into three sections: general questions about communication at DSV, preferences and opinions about communication, and demographics of the respondents. As evidenced by a survey conducted in Ghent, DSV is a multicultural company, where 48% of the population hailed from Belgium, with another 35% originating from Poland. The remaining 17% represented a diverse range of nationalities, including Afghanistan, Armenia, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, England, and Somalia. Interestingly, there were no respondents from the Netherlands, France, or Germany.

Secondly, interviews were conducted with the following top-level managers: Respondent 1, Business Unit Director at DSV; Respondent 2, Warehouse Manager; Respondent 3, Supervisor of Customer Service and Warehouse, responsible for Hologic; Respondent 4, Warehouse Supervisor, responsible for Steris and Intuitive; Respondent 5, Warehouse Supervisor, responsible for Integra. All of the interviews took place between August 1st to September 1st, 2023. Each manager was interviewed individually and received the same set of questions. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix 1 in the final section of the article.

Theoretical background

Within every team, diverse personalities coexist, and challenges are an inherent part of any group. Even teams that might appear flawless on the surface encounter issues that, from their standpoint, might appear insurmountable. However, with effective leadership and supervision, these problems can be identified early in the process of pursuing goals and plans, enabling the team to collaboratively address and resolve them promptly. The most common team challenges include team identity, poor communication, ineffective team leadership, conflicts, and cultural differences (HBR, 2010).

Team identity refers to the collective sense of belonging, purpose, and shared values that unite the members of a team. It is the unique personality and culture that distinguishes one team from another. Team identity is crucial in shaping team dynamics, motivation, and performance. It fosters a sense of togetherness and

belonging among the members, and when co-workers identify with their team, they are more likely to support and cooperate. Unfortunately, teams with a weak or non-existent identity might face challenges related to ineffective teamwork, culminating in worse performance. Bill Bethel once said, "A successful team is a group of many hands but of one mind" (HBR, 2010). It is a summary of the essence of team identity and how it should be perceived within a team context. In order to prevent the loss of that identity, above all, a good leader should create an environment in which team members will collaborate and work together to overcome challenges, striving for collective success. Additionally, new employees should be introduced to one of the key projects to help them feel engaged. It is also important for the leader to openly acknowledge the value of team differences, strive to engage all team members in bonding activities, and select individuals for the team with the right qualifications and skills.

Poor communication within a team is a significant challenge that can impede its overall effectiveness. This issue arises when team members struggle to convey information openly and effectively. It can manifest in various ways, including misunderstandings, missed messages, or a lack of coordination. Insufficient communication often leads to frustration and reduced productivity within the team. As stated by George Bernard Shaw: "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place" (Grossman, 2022). This quote highlights a common issue in communication, where people assume that effective communication has occurred, when in reality it has not. Effective communication is vital for a team to work cohesively and achieve its goals. A leader can help mitigate struggles with communication within the team by promoting a culture of open communication, organizing regular meetings and retrospectives, providing communication training, understanding differences in communication styles, ensuring the clarity of goals and tasks, in addition to supporting conflict resolution. A good habit for a leader is to have short, 15-minute team meetings every day to inform all the members about new procedures, updates about the company, and changes within the company. Another good practice is to have a whiteboard where the leader can post documents containing the most important information from meetings. A common language in which information is presented is an equally important aspect. In international teams, where different cultures work towards a common goal, they most often speak different languages.

Ineffective team leadership can lead to unclear goals, improper task allocation, insufficient communication, and lack of support for team members. This difficulty might be associated with the leader's poor team management skills, motivation, or an understanding of the team's needs. The long-term effects might include decreased morale, higher employee turnover, and a decrease in the team's work quality, which will all result in a lack of goal fulfilment. Therefore, team leadership needs to be successful, supportive, motivating, and inspiring. It is essential for leaders to continually receive training in various aspects of management, such as delivering feedback to their superiors, effectively managing a team, preventing conflicts, and many other types of training. As empathized by Vince Lombardi "Leaders aren't born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work" (Janson & Lawson, 2016). This quote suggests that leaders are not born with leadership abilities. Nevertheless, leadership is a skill that can be developed through effort and dedication, but only if a person wants to learn it.

Conflicts in a team are also a common challenge that can limit effectiveness and harmony in group work. They are differences in interests, values, or work approaches that can result in tensions and issues in relationships among team members. It is a hazardous stage where the team might fall out, which could result in worse performance and later on a lack of motivation to achieve the company's goals. Leaders need to recognize and manage conflicts to maintain peace within the team and ensure that conflicts do not harm the team's efficiency. It is also important to promote open communication and build trust so that conflicts can be resolved constructively, benefiting the entire team.

Cultural differences arise when team members come from diverse cultural backgrounds with distinct values, beliefs, and communication styles. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and reduced team cohesion. Team members from different cultures might interpret verbal and non-verbal cues differently. A gesture or phrase that is perfectly acceptable in one culture might be considered inappropriate in another one. These misunderstandings can lead to communication breakdowns and interpersonal conflicts. Nowadays, this aspect is known in many multicultural companies which employ not only residents but also non-residents. Leaders should promote cultural sensitivity, encourage open dialogue to bridge cultural gaps and create a multicultural team environment that leverages these differences as strengths rather than challenges.

In the context of challenges in teamwork, several important conclusions might be drawn. Firstly, these challenges are common and can arise in any team, regardless of its characteristics or size. Secondly, effective leadership plays a crucial role in overcoming these challenges. Team leaders should promote a culture of open communication, manage conflicts, support the development of team members, and be attentive to cultural differences. The conclusion is that the ability to recognize and address these challenges is a key element of effective team management. Collaboratively working to eliminate these issues can improve team productivity and contribute to achieving the organization's goals.

Results

In the warehouse in Belgium, the author of this study observed many of the aforementioned cross-cultural aspects and challenges. Consequently, several of these aspects were investigated through both the survey and interviews with top-level managers, at the end comparing them with other authors of similar articles or books.

Regarding the first question in the interview concerning the importance of effective communication in managing an international team, each of the managers emphasized that this is an incredibly critical aspect, especially in a place like the DSV warehouse. Many people come from different countries, and as a consequence, they all have different communication styles and manners. As highlighted by Respondent 1 in his statement, DSV employs people from over 40 different countries. To ensure effective communication with the lowest-level employees, it is essential to facilitate a smooth flow of information from the highest levels down to these employees, assuring that the right information reaches the right individuals. He underlined that

communication should also flow from the bottom to the top. The timing of communication as it passes through specific levels in the organization is also crucial, and he stated that it presents a rather challenging obstacle to overcome. Respondent 2 underlined the necessity to involve all employees in the communication process to foster growth and advancement as an international corporation. Supervisors also underscored the paramount importance of effective communication in an international context. They all underlined that it is the cornerstone of productive collaboration with their co-workers. Effective communication is a crucial aspect of organizational efficiency. Without it, individuals remain unaware of the company's developments, and they are unsure about how their work contributes to achieving the company's objectives. As pointed out by Respondent 3, communication is hopefully a two-way dialogue.

Questions about feedback revealed that most employees believe feedback should be provided weekly (43%). Nonetheless, 25% of the participants think it should be given daily. Summing up, 78% of the entire sample indicated that they prefer to receive feedback at least once a week. It needs to be stressed that feedback should be delivered appropriately. This implies that every employee in higher positions should be adequately trained to convey information to lower-level employees in the right manner. Team leaders should stick to the rule that negative feedback is always given to the person privately, while positive feedback can be given not only privately, but also publicly for motivational purposes of the employee concerned and for others to improve.

A similar question was about the feedback received by Management. It occurred that as many as 32% of the survey population indicated that they receive negative feedback more often. After comparing two questions related to feedback and gender, it was revealed that women tend to receive negative feedback, while men are much more likely to receive positive.
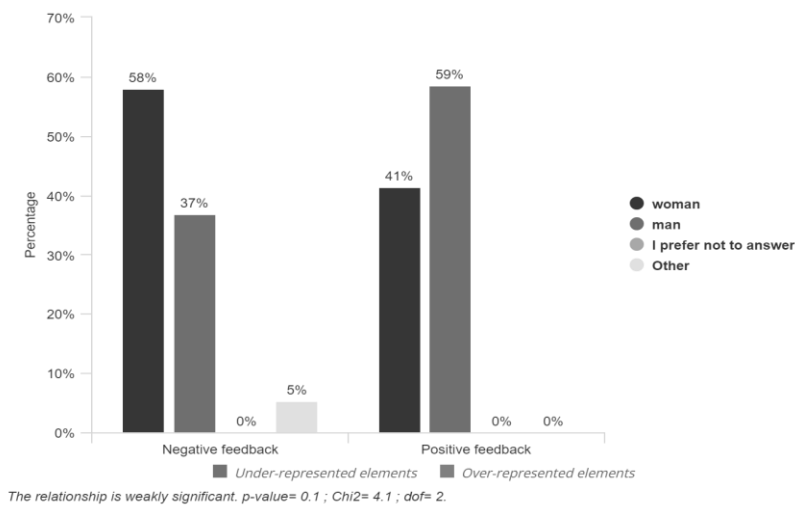

Figure 1. Types of feedback given by management in DSV and sex of respondents

Source: Author's research using Sphinx

169

It can be suggested that this could be related, among others, to gender inequalities, as observed in the Ghent warehouse, where immediate managerial positions are often held by women. This can lead to a female-dominated immediate leadership and the subordination of women within the organizational structure. As a result, there might be subjective assessment of achievements and feedback that tends to favor the dominant gender. Additionally, gender stereotypes could also influence the survey's outcomes. That is why it is so important that people in managerial positions treat everyone equally, regardless of gender, and preferences.

On the other hand, when it comes to criticism, it appears slightly more frequently than negative feedback. Forty percent of the respondents were criticized by the DSV management. Fifteen percent are uncertain, and 2% of the participants do not want to say. The remaining respondents, which is 43%, were not criticized. People who answered affirmatively to this question were asked whether the criticism took place publicly or privately. What is concerning is that 54% of them responded that they were criticized in front of others. This is more than half of the people who answered the previous question, which is a high result. Negative feedback should always be expressed privately between the team leader and the employee concerned. It would be worth investing in additional training for immediate managers to improve their skills in providing feedback to their employees in the team. This is why team leaders should be properly trained in giving feedback to avoid situations where performance feedback is given publicly. The ineffective leadership might be destroying the team.

Table 1. Combined analysis about criticism in DSV

	%
▲ Have you ever been criticized by Management at DSV?	
Yes	40%
No	43%
Hard to say	15%
I do not want to say.	2%
▲ Where have you been criticized?	
in public	54%
in private	46%

Source: Author's research using Sphinx

The only multiple-choice question in the survey was about opinions regarding communication barriers in the company. Each respondent could select up to three answers. As can be seen in the chart below, the most significant barrier, chosen by 52% of the respondents, was the language barrier, which hinders effective communication at DSV. Right behind it, with 47% of those surveyed, was the category related to the lack of feedback for employees, as was also evident in previous charts.

Third place was shared by two categories, hierarchical barriers and gossip, with 38% of the participants each. It is worth noting that 33% of the sample indicated that they do not trust the management, and 27% found meetings to be ineffective.
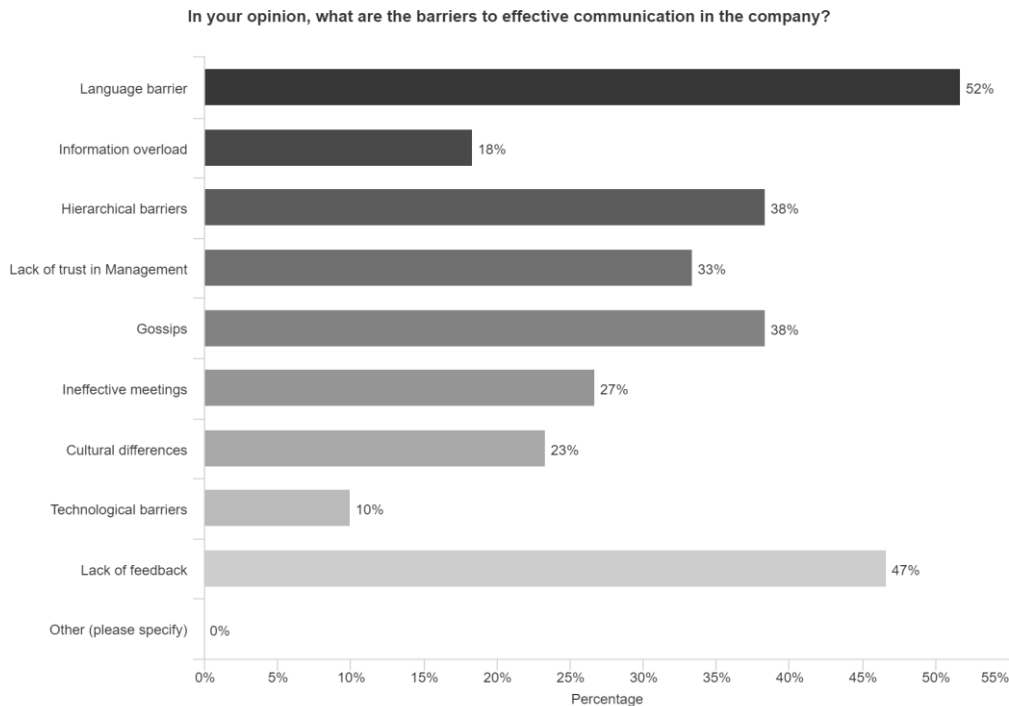

Figure 2. Barriers to effective communication in DSV

Source: Author's research using Sphinx

It must be borne in mind that many employees in the company are foreigners, which means that the common language of communication between them and people from Belgium is English. Unfortunately, not all messages, documents, and places are described/written in English. Many things are still in Dutch, which have caused communication problems for a significant proportion of warehouse personnel. Additionally, English is not the native language for both sides, hence certain information might be understood quite differently by both parties. This, in turn, can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretation of messages, and later unnecessary additional actions related to them.

In such a multicultural company, the language of communication during meetings, which nonetheless take place every day, is also significant. 43% of the respondents expressed the desire for meetings to be conducted in English. 28% of the people surveyed suggested that meetings should be held in Dutch, but there was also a response with the same percentage of respondents indicating indifference to the language used in such meetings. The results below might mean that employees would like to have the choice and be able to participate in meetings either in English or Dutch.
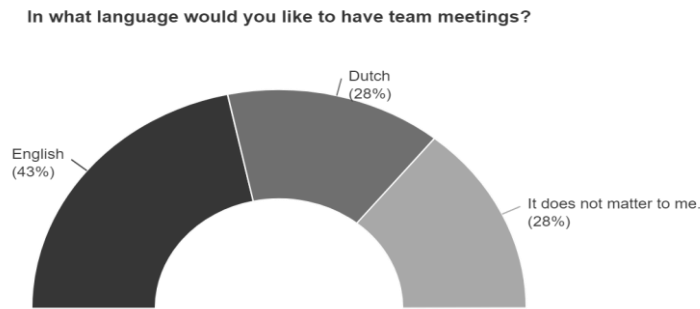
In what language would you like to have team meetings?

Figure 3. Preferred language used during meetings

Source: Author's research using Sphinx

However, after combining two questions about the language used during meetings and the respondents' age, it was found that there is a significant relationship between them. People in the age range of 19-34 would much prefer to have meetings in English, with a total of 74% of respondents choosing this option. In contrast, within the same age group, only 41% of people indicated a preference for meetings in Dutch. For individuals aged 35 and above, 59% prefer Dutch, and only 26% choose English. As the author believes, the younger the generation, the more often employees are inclined to participate in meetings in English rather than in their native language. The older generation still prefers their own language and does not want to adapt to people from other cultures.
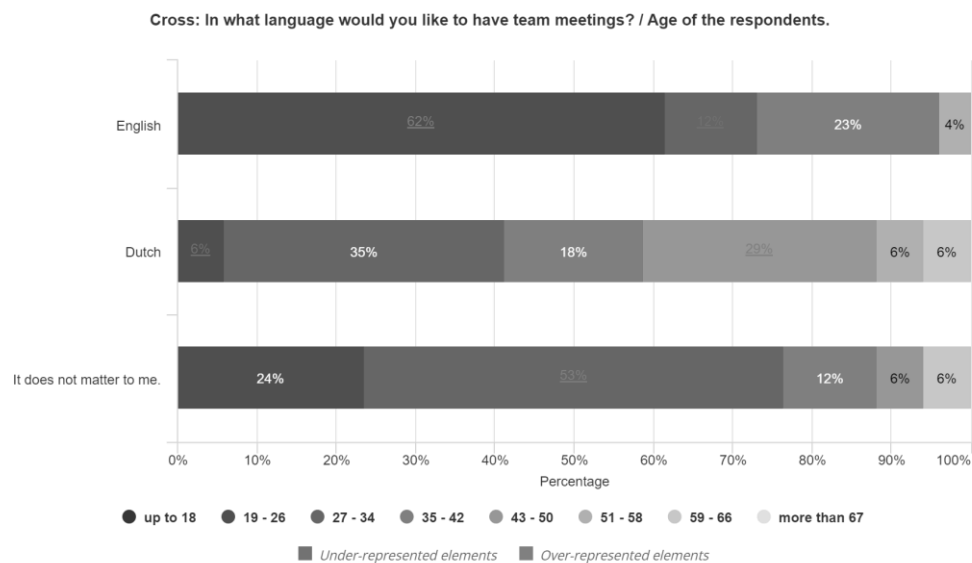
The relationship is very significant. p-value= < 0,01 ; Chi2= 28.5 ; dof= 10.

Figure 4. Preferences of language during meetings as a function of age of respondents

Source: Author's research using Sphinx

When it comes to communication, employees and leaders need to be trained in this area. Subsequent questions focused on this topic. As can be seen in the chart below, the respondents were asked whether they had ever had the opportunity to receive training on how to communicate effectively within the organization. 25% indicated that they had received such training at some point. 68% of the respondents had never received any related training, and 7% stated that they would have such training in the future.

Have you received adequate training or guidance on how to communicate effectively within the company?
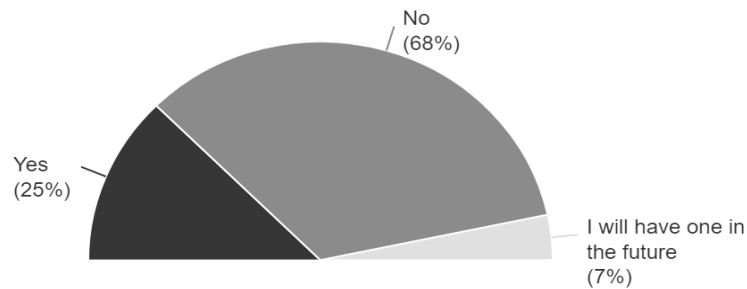

Figure 5. Receiving adequate communication training in DSV

Source: Author's research using Sphinx

This lack of communication training is a critical issue. Denisi and Griffin (2005) emphasize that training in communication skills is essential for organizational success, particularly in a diverse environment. Effective communication training can help bridge cultural gaps, improve understanding, and enhance team collaboration. Unfortunately, DSV has not provided adequate training for its employees on effective communication in international teams. In addition to introducing such training by qualified people, additional team-building activities could also be introduced to get acquainted with different cultures and get to know each other. Such actions could improve communication between employees and leaders, which would also improve the overall satisfaction with communication at DSV, and employee bonds could become closer, which could result in better results at work and, consequently, better efficiency.

Discussion

As evidenced by the comparisons with other authors, many of the results obtained from the survey conducted in Belgium closely align with findings from other scholarly works.

The study of DSV underscores the pivotal role of effective communication in managing international teams, a finding that is consistent with existing literature on the subject. For instance, Denisi and Griffin (2005) identified communication as a critical determinant of team effectiveness within global contexts, emphasizing that the ability to convey and receive information across cultural boundaries is essential

for organizational success. The managers at DSV similarly highlighted the importance of two-way communication, a view supported by Hargie (2011), who argued that effective communication extends beyond mere information transmission to include the exchange of feedback, which is vital for both employee development and organizational efficiency (Hargie, 2011).

The data from the survey reveals that 78% of employees prefer to receive feedback at least once a week, which aligns with the findings of McCarthy and Eastman (1999), who reported that regular feedback is a key driver of motivation and performance. The consensus across these studies suggests that providing feedback once or twice a week is optimal to enhance employee performance and maintain high levels of engagement in the workplace.

The most significant communication barrier at DSV was found to be language, aligning with findings by Scullion and Collings (2006), who highlighted language differences as a major challenge in international management. Similarly, poor communication, identified as a critical challenge in this study, is echoed in the work of Tenzer, Pudelko, and Harzing (2017), who emphasize the detrimental impact of language barriers and misunderstandings on team dynamics in international settings. The use of English as a common language exacerbates the problem as not all communications and documents are in English. Tung (1999) suggests that translating the aforementioned things to the language spoken by employees can improve communication effectiveness.

Additionally, the study identifies a generational divide in language preferences for meetings, with younger employees showing a preference for English, while older employees favor Dutch. This trend is consistent with research by Choi and Lee (2011), who found that younger generations are more open to global languages and cultures, while older generations may prefer their native language, potentially impacting communication effectiveness in international organizations. In contrast, older generations may prefer their native language, potentially posing challenges to effective communication in multinational organizations. This generational difference in language preference highlights the need for adaptable communication strategies that can cater to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of employees.

The study also highlights gender-based differences in feedback reception, with indications of potential bias. These findings resonate with the work of Powell and Butterfield (1994), who observed that women, particularly in male-dominated environments, are more likely to receive negative feedback. This suggests persistent gender dynamics that could influence both the delivery and reception of feedback within international teams. Moreover, the issue of gender-based feedback disparities also observed in this study aligns with the findings of Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2017), who explore the influence of gender dynamics on performance evaluations and feedback in professional settings.

A concerning observation from the study is the frequent occurrence of public criticism. Research by Smither and London (2009) demonstrated that public criticism can have detrimental effects on employee morale and overall performance. This underscores the importance of training managers in the nuances of feedback delivery, particularly in international contexts where cultural sensitivities can further complicate communication dynamics.

Lastly, comparing the results about adequate training in communication from the DSV survey to findings from other studies highlights a common challenge in international organizations. For example, a study by Matsumoto et al. (2011) found that 72% of employees in multinational corporations reported a lack of adequate communication training. Similarly, a survey conducted by Gudykunst (2005) revealed that only 30% of employees in culturally diverse workplaces received proper communication training, which aligns closely with the 25% reported in the DSV survey.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the critical role of effective communication in managing international teams, aligning with existing research. The findings highlight common challenges, including language barriers, generational differences, and gender dynamics, emphasizing the need for regular feedback and adequate communication training. These insights underscore the necessity for tailored strategies to improve communication in multicultural environments.

Conclusions

The findings derived from the survey, interviews, and comparison with other scholarly works indicate that managing a cross-cultural team demands extensive knowledge, continuous training, effective communication, and a well-structured feedback strategy. Additionally, it requires ongoing commitment to adapting to the dynamic changes within such teams.

Team leaders and senior managers should have appropriate skills and experience to be able to effectively manage their intercultural teams. Therefore, a key aspect is the continuous training of both groups in terms of effective communication in an international team, giving positive and negative feedback, as well as having challenging conversations with the members. Messages should always be expressed in a universal language so that everyone can understand them. Additionally, each piece of information should be delivered at the right time, to the right employees, in the right way, in the right place without external disruptions, and by appropriate, authorized people in managerial positions. Team leaders should be neutral and tolerant towards each employee, regardless of gender, age, appearance and race. They should not favor anyone and should not spread information entrusted to them to other colleagues as part of small talk or gossip. Skip-level meetings and growth conversations should take place once a quarter individually with the employee as an open dialogue to understand the problems and dilemmas of each of them. Changing the inscriptions on all blue boards to English, as well as changing all messages, and documentation would significantly improve the understanding of information by team employees. Standardizing the transfer of information among all team leaders would mean that every employee would receive the same information on a given topic, which would eliminate gaps between different teams.

Even though DSV has been operating in international markets for many years, the Ghent warehouse still has many communication areas that should be analyzed and structured to improve the company's performance. Management takes many steps to improve communication between teams, departments and management.

The results from the DSV Ghent warehouse study highlight key challenges in communication within international teams, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and the need for effective feedback. Comparing these findings with other studies underscores the importance of effective communication, regular feedback, and appropriate manager training in managing international teams. To improve communication efficiency and employee morale at DSV, it is recommended to invest further in communication training and to adapt the language used in documentation and meetings to meet employees' needs.

The limitations of this study were influenced by several factors. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, which may impact the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the data collection period coincided with the holiday season, during which many employees were on vacation with their families, leading to a potential underrepresentation of the workforce. Lastly, there were logistical challenges in distributing the survey to every employee, which may have further limited the comprehensiveness of the collected data. In future studies, the author would conduct both paper and electronic surveys to ensure that every employee had access to the survey at their convenience, such as during lunch breaks. Additionally, the survey would be conducted during a month with the fewest vacations to maximize participation and obtain a more representative sample.

References

Choi, J. S., & Lee, D. K. (2011). The impact of generational differences on language preferences in the workplace. *Journal of Business Communication*, *48*(2), 192-211.

Cools, E., & Van den Broeck, H. (2007). The hunt for the Heffalump continues: can trait and cognitive characteristics predict entrepreneurial orientation?. *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, *18*(2), 23-41.

Denisi, A. S., & Griffin, R. W. (2005). *Human resource management* (4th ed.). Houghton Mifflin.

Dewulf, L. (2011). Managing cultural diversity in Belgium: A perspective on language, regionalism, and national identity. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *24*(5), 725-739.

Grosskopf, S., & Barmeyer, C. (2021). Learning from multi-paradigmatic sensitivity in cross-cultural management?. *Empirical and Theoretical Considerations. International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, *21*(2), 181-202. DOI: 10.1177/14705958211019437

Grossman, D. (2022). Effects of Poor Communication in the Workplace (with Solutions). August 29, 2022. https://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/poor-communication-in-the-workplace (accessed: 15.01.2024).

Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). *Theorizing about intercultural communication*. Sage Publications.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Haque, A. U., & Yamoah, F. A. (2021). The role of ethical leadership in managing occupational stress to promote innovative work behaviour: A cross-cultural management perspective. *Sustainability*, *13*(17), 9608. DOI: 10.3390/su13179608

Hargie, O. (2011). *The handbook of communication skills* (4th ed.). Routledge.

HBR. (2010). *Managing Teams*. Harvard Business School Publishing.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. SAGE Publications.

Ibarra, H., Ely, R., & Kolb, D. (2017). Women rising: The unseen barriers. *Harvard Business Review*, *91*(9), 60-66.

Janson, I. N., & Lawson, L. M. (2016). Ineffective leadership. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*, *13*(7), 849-855. DOI: 10.1016/j.jacr.2016.02.008

Janssens, M., Lambert, J., & Steyaert, C. (2004). Developing language strategies for international companies: The contribution of translation studies. *Journal of World Business*, *39*(4), 414-430. DOI: 10.1016/j.jwb.2004.08.006

Koekemoer, L., de Beer, L. T., Govender, K., Brouwers, M. (2021). Leadership behaviour, team effectiveness, technological flexibility, work engagement and performance during COVID-19 lockdown: An exploratory study. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *47*. DOI: 10.4102/sajip.v47i0.1829

Matsumoto, D., Yoo, S. H., & LeRoux, J. A. (2011). *Emotion and intercultural communication*. Oxford University Press.

McCarthy, S. P., & Eastman, T. R. (1999). The role of feedback in motivating employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *84*(1), 161-170.

Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business*. PublicAffairs.

Nwankwo, E. E., Ogedengbe, D. E., Oladapo, J. O., Soyombo, O. T., & Okoye, C. C. (2024). Cross-cultural leadership styles in multinational corporations: A comparative literature review. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*, *11*(1), 2041-2047. DOI: 10.30574/ijsra.2024.11.1.0273

Powell, G. N., & Butterfield, D. A. (1994). Gender and managerial advancement: A review and analysis. *Academy of Management Journal*, *37*(1), 66-85.

Scullion, M. H., & Collings, D. G. (2006). *Globalizing human resource management*. Routledge.

Smither, J. W., & London, M. (2009). *Performance appraisal: State of the art in practice*. Jossey--Bass.

Tenzer, H., Pudelko, M., & Harzing, A. W. (2017). The impact of language barriers on trust formation in multinational teams. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *45*(5), 508-535. DOI: 10.1057/jibs.2013.64

Thomas, D. C., & Peterson, M. F. (2017). *Cross-cultural management: Essential concepts* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2007). *Communicating across cultures*. The Guilford Press.

Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (2011). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity in global business* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Tung, A. L. (1999). The role of language in multinational corporations. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *10*(2), 351-370.

Appendix 1

Interview questions:
1. In your opinion, how important is effective communication in managing an international team?
2. Why is communication so important to achieve company goals?
3. How would you rate the effectiveness of communication in general at DSV?
4. What communication challenges is DSV currently facing?
5. What are the communication tools at DSV and how do you rate their effectiveness?
6. Regarding to the previous question, what is the most effective method of communication with such wide cultural diversity and why?
7. Is there anything at the moment that can be improved to make internal communication more effective and efficient in DSV?
8. What changes would you suggest to improve employee engagement and satisfaction with internal communication?
9. What should the feedback to the employee on their work efficiency look like?
10. Do you think supervisors should adapt the type and the way of passing the information to each employee separately or should they adapt to the whole group? Why would it be important?

KOMUNIKACJA I KULTURA INFORMACJI ZWROTNEJ W FIRMACH WIELOKULTUROWYCH: PRZYPADEK DSV W BELGII

Streszczenie: We współczesnym świecie organizacje coraz częściej działają ponad granicami ze względu na globalizację, która wymaga zarządzania zespołami wielokulturowymi. Osoby zarządzające międzynarodowymi zespołami stają w obliczu wyzwań, które wymagają od nich radzenia sobie z różnicami kulturowymi, barierami językowymi i różnymi praktykami pracy przy jednoczesnym osiąganiu celów organizacyjnych. Zarządzanie zespołem międzykulturowym obejmuje sztukę kierowania zróżnicowanymi zespołami o różnym pochodzeniu kulturowym w kierunku wspólnych celów. Wymaga ono biegłości w rozumieniu, szanowaniu i wykorzystywaniu różnic kulturowych w celu wspierania współpracy i innowacji. Skuteczne zarządzanie zespołem międzykulturowym tworzy środowisko, w którym różne perspektywy harmonizują, aby napędzać sukces w zglobalizowanym krajobrazie. Głównym celem tego artykułu jest zbadanie i przeanalizowanie wybranych aspektów zarządzania międzykulturowego w międzynarodowym kontekście biznesowym. Wykorzystano przypadek DSV w Belgii, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem tego, w jaki sposób różnice kulturowe, bariery językowe i zróżnicowane praktyki pracy wpływają na zarządzanie zespołami wielokulturowymi. Badanie wykazało, że skuteczne zarządzanie międzykulturowe w DSV w Belgii obejmuje dostosowanie stylów przywództwa i strategii komunikacji do różnorodności kulturowej siły roboczej, co wzmacnia współpracę zespołową i ogólną wydajność organizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: komunikacja, zarządzanie międzykulturowe, skuteczne przywództwo, zespół wielokulturowy, bariery językowe