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CHAPTER 3

A qualitative exploration study into communication concerns between Western employers and Vietnamese employees in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Vietnam

Abstract

The contemporary labor market requires highly-internationalized workers who are trained and endowed with "communication and soft skills". Nevertheless, half of the new graduates in the current labor force in Vietnam are not prepared with those skills for working in a multicultural context (Tran, 2012, 2015). In order to understand the problematic issues with respect to intercultural communication, the present study aims to explore in depth the communication issues in the intercultural workplace context in Western subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Ho Chi Minh city in Vietnam. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 Western higher managers and 33 Vietnamese employees to gain insights into their main concerns in working with their cross-cultural counterparts. The results indicated that there were many concerns in the Western managers' viewpoints centralizing around (1) *lack of communication* and (2) *lack of autonomy in getting work done and motivation in professional development* from the Vietnamese employees. From the Vietnamese employees' side, there were not many concerns brought about and the negative points were not frequently mentioned. Implications are suggested for composing intercultural communication curricular not only for higher education training but also for employee and employer coaching.

3.1   Introduction

In the last decades, Vietnam has been undergoing a big transformation in the economy. The fast growing economy has attracted many international companies. Higher education in Vietnam is considered to be responsible for providing students with professional knowledge and skills to satisfy the demands of the international employment market (Pham, 2008). However, half of the new graduates in Vietnam are not prepared for working in a multicultural context (Tran, 2012, 2015) and 50% of students need to be retrained for "communication and soft skills" when they get their job in order to meet the requirements of the contemporary labor market (Luong, 2010; Tran, 2012). In a report on Higher Education in East Asia by World Bank in 2012, it was claimed that "communication and language remain one of the primary concerns for foreign managers operating in Vietnam" (Weng, 2015, p. 83).

Moreover, considering the fact that expatriates from Western nations and Vietnamese host-nationals (local staff) work and interact together on a daily basis and the two parties are from two divergent cultures, conflicts and misunderstandings at the workplace are inevitable. This might be a problem for both parties to complete their tasks and obtain work productivity. Cultural distance has been understood the key reason for those conflicts and misunderstandings (Brew & Cairns, 2004; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011; Hofstede, 2001; Peltokorpi, 2008; Redmond, 2000). Cultural distance, in fact, is a crucial factor taken into account when business failures occur because it is contended that in many cases when no explanations can be found for a business challenge, culture should be blamed (Taras, Piers & Bradley, 2011). Besides, professional interaction might frequently lead to conflicts and communication problems even in a well-organized institution. Accordingly, more problems and conflicts might occur when professionals from two divergent cultures communicate and interact. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine what type of communication issues come about when professionals from the two divergent cultures, Western and Vietnamese, work side by side.

The significance of this study is constituted from several reasons. First, the number of foreign subsidiaries and joint ventures in the area of Southeast Asia in general and in Vietnam in particular has been increasingly growing; conducting this study makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge of cross-cultural management in Southeast Asia in which closely similar cultural background is recognized. Second, outcomes of this study may be used as a manual to assist the host-country nationals as well as foreign expatriates to avoid cultural-sensitive situations in their daily work. This information is useful for international human resource managers to invent cross-cultural training programs for both the host-country nationals as well as the prospective foreign managers coming to work in those areas. Third, the subsequent effect of this study, which is raising both the Western employers' and Vietnamese employees' awareness of the problems they encountered and how to avoid them might also be disseminated to other enterprises in the area of Asia and around the world. Finally, the findings of this study might be beneficial to higher education educators to provide their students with useful tips in order to work with foreign expatriates in the future, preparing them for working in an international competitive labor market.

3.2   Theoretical background

3.2.1   Impact of cultural distance on communication in a multicultural workplace

Cultural distance affects communication in the multicultural workplace and effective communication plays a crucial role in international business. **A**s the distance between Western and Vietnamese culture is significant (Vo & Hannif, 2013), its impact on communication between two parties is unavoidable.

Cultural distance is one of the most widely examined constructs in international business research (Manish, Mohammad, Vikas & Ajai, 2016; Shenkar, 2001). Cultural distance can be defined as the degree of dissimilarity between two cultures or "the extent to which the shared norms and values in one country differ from those in another" (Rian & Arjen, 2006, p. 162). The more dissimilar cultures are, the harder communication between people from those cultures becomes.

It is inevitable that international business requires intense communication of people from divergent cultures. During this interactional process, culture clashes frequently happen and disturb the ongoing negotiation, planning as well as production. The need to adjust, to accept and understand other people seem to be indispensable for effective communication. Attempts have been made in many studies examining the effects of cultural divergence on international business communication.

Discussing about the impact of cultural distance, Taras, Piers & Bradley (2011) confirmed six work-related value outcomes due to the differences of individualistic and collectivistic culture: 1) leadership styles, 2) group dynamics, 3) communication styles, 4) fairness and compensation, 5) conflict handling preferences and 6) work design. With respect to *leadership styles*, these researchers argued that people from individualist, low power distance cultures are consistently in favor of participative leadership while the ones from collectivistic, high power distance cultures prefer more direct and charismatic leaders. *Group dynamics* refers to collectivists having the need for being with others and the need for social support. They seem to prefer to work in a team and are more committed to the team than are individualists. On the contrary, "individualists are less likely to conform to group pressures. Consequently, collectivists show strong favoritism to the groups to which they belong, while individualists tend not to have such strong group affiliations" (Taras, Piers & Bradley, 2011, p. 192). With respect to *communication styles*, direct communication, openness and self-promotion are characteristics of individualists whereas indirectness and modesty are common attributes of collectivists. Individualists' communication relies heavily on verbal context; most of the things are expressed in words while collectivists are not always clear in their message; they use a lot of non-verbal cues to transfer the information. Differences in *fairness and compensation* mean that individualists prefer equity rules in distribution of rewards and punishments; this means that the more you contribute, the greater rewards you deserve. In collectivistic culture, equality rules are favored in which people are much more comfortable with each member of the group receiving equal compensation regardless of individual effort or input. Furthermore, the collectivistic "high-power distance culture have strong preference for seniority rule that allocates the greatest reward or responsibility to the eldest or otherwise most senior group members" (Taras, Piers & Bradley, 2011, p. 192). In regard with the fairness in decision-making criteria, individualist cultures are closely associated with cooperative decision-making style whereas collectivistic cultures incline to a top-down decision-making process. Differences with respect to *conflict handling preferences* imply that the collectivistic cultures show a strong concern for interests of other party and the presence of a third party or a mediator. They always try to keep harmony and cooperative spirit. On the contrary, the individualists have a strong opposition to unfairness and always raise their voice if they feel there is partial treatment happening. Finally, in terms of *work design*, people from collectivistic high power

distance cultures prefer more structured and paternalistic relationships. They often prefer being clearly instructed and feel uncomfortable with initiative supervision. On the other hand, the individualists favor work design that allows for personal autonomy, flexibility, involvement in the decision-making process and opportunities to make personal contributions (Taras, Piers & Bradley, 2011). In summary, Tara and colleagues made quite a clear distinction between the individualistic and collectivistic cultural values that can influence the workplace outcomes. They also concluded that overlooking cultural dissimilarities in the workplace is equivalent to several million dollars losses, which means that cultural values might predict employee outcomes with more strength than traditional factors such as demographics, personality traits, and cognitive ability. To conclude, in order to enhance productivity and profitability as well as create a more cohesive and satisfied workplace, cultural value measures should be added to the company's toolkit contributions (Taras, Piers & Bradley, 2011).

Adding to the complications that cultural distance brings about, Frederic & Hirsch (1994) identified the reasons of Western joint-ventures' failures in Asia. The authors concluded that culture clash, which is "no understanding of the importance of cross-cultural cooperation" (Frederic & Hirsch, 1994, p. 198) was the most significant reason. This reason might be mostly derived from the dissimilarities between the two cultures. A first dissimilarity is along the dimension of individualism and group orientation. This dissimilarity might easily create conflicts because the collective orientation values relationship, face maintenance and reward sharing, whereas the individualistic orientation focuses on individual success and has little regard to relationship building (Frederic & Hirsch, 1994). The second dissimilarity refers to power distance, which includes differences in levels of employees' participation in decision-making. They concluded that "there is a need to be more sensitive to the way cultural values intrude into the joint venture process" (Frederic & Hirsch, 1994, p. 200). The researchers added that a combination of cultural awareness and professional skills is required.

Adding insights into previous frameworks by investigating the difficulties higher managers confront due to cultural distance and targeting to reduce the negative impact that cultural distance might bring about, Hasan, Mehmet & Demet (2014) probed into multinational company managers' perceptions of cultural difference management by means of structured questionnaires and question forms. The sample included 18 managers from several international organizations situated in Ankara. The findings revealed the difficulties managers faced in their multinational context. The difficulties mainly include (1) different cultural backgrounds might make reaching agreement more difficult, (2) cultural differences might make communication difficult because explaining things to members of other cultures takes a lot of time and energy, (3) information transmitted within the company must be in greater details and in more time and too much of differences in opinions and perspectives might cause communication breakdowns in certain processes and activities, and (4) some managers prefer employees from their own cultures because it is easier to have a common language with people they are working with. Nevertheless, the findings showed that those 18 managers also realized some benefits which are (1) "cultural pluralism can be defined as having different perceptions of reality, which is an important source of creativity" (Hasan, Mehmet & Demet, 2014, p. 350), and (2) it is more fun and challenging to manage an organizational structure composed of multicultural people. Finally, the authors suggested that organizations need to take cultural differences into consideration as in organizations where cultural distance is ignored, the negative consequences of this can drive the employees apart from each other. On the other hand, in organizations where cultural differences are seen as significant and effectively managed, employees have a closer relationship and a stronger commitment to their workplace, and multicultural organizations gain higher levels of creativity and

innovation. Therefore, the managers must ensure that these advantageous differences are respected, protected, developed and made use of (Hasan, Mehmet & Demet, 2014).

The study of intercultural practices is not something new, specifically for Western and Eastern culture, which are, for a long time in history, believed to have two contrasting ideologies. Yet, the problematic interaction and communication between these two entities have not been deeply examined in previous studies and particularly in the context of Vietnam, a deep-rooted Eastern culture.

3.2.2   The Vietnamese workplace context

For a long time, Vietnamese culture has been influenced by Confucianism, which comprises of high collectivism, large power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and long-term orientation (Vuong, 2002). After the economic reform "Doi Moi" (1986), the Vietnamese government activated the country's economic activities by reorganizing state owned enterprises, encouraging private businesses and attracting foreign direct investment (Weng, 2015). Because of the need to transfer but still dominated by Confucian ideology, the Vietnamese economy has been in a mixed landscape, receiving dramatic changes and struggling within the old and novel typology simultaneously. This transfer not only brought in international practices but also international managers as the current personnel were not qualified enough to keep pace with the new trend (Weng, 2015). As the influx of foreign companies came to the country, the call for more industry ready graduates increased; however, it has remained that "many of the companies apparently found it difficult to find local employees that match their needs" (Weng, 2015, p. 82). Several complaints were made from foreign enterprises that the local employees lacked requisite skills encompassing both the technical and behavioral skills including interpersonal communication skills. For this reason, the companies have to offer them additional training and expenses to bring them up to speed (Le, Rowley, Truong & Warner, 2007; Weng, 2015). Examinations into the relationships between Western employers and local employees, albeit not many, have also been made in order to improve their cross-cultural communication and partnership. Tran (2013) examined expatriates' problems with cross-cultural management (CCM) and international human resource management (IHRM). The researcher used two sources for this investigation. The first instrument was a questionnaire sent to 150 expatriates (from both Asian and Western countries) who were living and working in Ho Chi Minh city. The second source was data gathered from documents, books, internet websites, articles and journals and governmental regulations related to representative office in Vietnam. Tran examined expatriates' CCM and IHRM using the following dimensions: *cultural differences, nonverbal communication, sense of time, relationship building, negotiation, underestimation, overestimation*, and *making no attempt to understand the Vietnamese working style*. Among the four types of respondents, Asians, Europeans, Oceanians, and Americans, the Asians seemed to have fewer problems working with local people than the others as they showed the lowest mean score in most aspects. Tran (2013) also found that Europeans seemed to face more problems working with local people than the others, with the highest mean scores in five dimensions.

A survey research conducted by Weng (2015) delved into the problems and conflicts including *work orientation*, *work communication,* and *work language* that experienced international managers in Ho Chi Minh City faced when communicating with the local employees at work. *Work orientation* refers to individuals' work planning and organization and adherence to agreed deadlines. *Work communication* concerns employees' asking questions and giving feedback, and *work language* refers to employees' lack of jargon and depth of understanding. After detecting and synthesizing series of problems and resolutions from the managers, Weng offered the following recommendations for

practice such as *building relations* with employees by showing interests in them and inquiring about their wellbeing in order to tackle their difficulties and anxiety at work; *building empathy or understanding* through stressing the importance of listening, understanding, and adapting; *setting expectations from the start* by telling them about appropriate behaviors, communication or otherwise; *planning for communication skills training*; *providing for individual coaching and mentoring* by imparting intricate work skills gained from the manager's personal experiences; *consulting the employees* through listening to them and discussing their recommendations with them; *scheduling regular one on one consultation sessions* as the employees are not comfortable with volunteering feedback or suggestions and need encouragement from the management on a regular basis and *reducing hierarchy or power distance*. Adding to those propositions, Weng suggested that employees should be equipped with a set of skills that matches the manufacturing and service sectors rather than the agricultural sector (Weng, 2015).

Chung & Linh (2012) investigated the cultural adaptation to the Vietnamese context of Unilever, a British-Dutch multinational consumer goods company, by taking five dimensions from Hofstede's model. Investigation into Unilever's cultural adaptation to the Vietnamese work context was conducted. The results revealed that as a Western company doing business in an Eastern-oriented nation, Unilever did indeed encounter a number of problems originating from the cultural distance. Those problems were *weak loyalty and short employment duration*, *corruption and bureaucracy*, *frequent work overload*, and *misunderstandings between foreign managers and native employees*. However, the corporation also gained various benefits from the similarities of its core values with Vietnamese culture, such as impressive success in the Vietnamese market "which created good conditions for the company to enhance its global corporate culture" (Chung & Linh, 2012, p. 62). The findings of this case study confirm that cultural distance can have both advantages and disadvantages during the process of cultural adaptation.

In the current study, we specifically examine cultural distance between Vietnamese and Western culture and its impact on communication of professionals from those two cultures. In the following section, we present 6 work-related values that we use as a frame for our interview analysis.

3.2.3 Management expectation

When an employee enters a company, an official contract between the employee and the company or the employer are signed. After signing this contract, both sides should be obligated to all the policies, terms and conditions in this contract. Specifically, in the official contract or employment contract, all the points should be explicitly written down what each party promises to do (e.g., work outputs) or give (e.g, pay or benefits) and what will happen if either party fails to perform as promised. This also means that what penalty would be conducted if either party fails to deliver or abrogate the contract (Cooper & Robertson, 2002). However, in addition to all the obligations in this contract, there are also some invisible expectations from both sides because the central point in all relationships is fulfilling each other's expectations and that definitely applies to the employer/manager and employee relationship as well. The official contract itself cannot cover the complexity of all the possible expectations of both parties (Cooper & Robertson, 2002). Accordingly, researchers usually endeavor to explore the "psychological contract" between employers and employees in order to get an insightful view of the invisible expectations that both parties long for. Nevertheless, in the context of this study, we do not carefully examine employer and employee psychological contract but we just delved into the gap in expectations between Western employers/managers and Vietnamese employees. We attempted to investigate how different expectations they have due to the cultural differences in their

backgrounds. As the Western employers/managers come to Vietnam wih their duty, they are hold accountable to many new standards while being forced themselves to be adapted to the new culture in the destination companies and country. Because of this mission, the Western employers/managers set quite high expectations of what they need to achieve. Therefore, besides the official contract they make with the local employees, there are some underlying values that they might await whereas from the Vietnamese employees, their expectations might be lower than those of the expatriate employers/managers since local professionals often overestimate expatriate managers/employers and believe that those employers/managers are well-qualified and worthy of the position they hold in the organizations (Syed, Hazboun & Murray, 2014). Due to the expectation gap between the expatriates and the locals, we predicted that they might hold different perspectives towards their cross-cultural counterparts' working style.

3.2.4   Differences in work-related values between Western and Vietnamese culture

In Chapter 2, we utilized a questionnaire to examine the differences in work-related attitudes between Western and Vietnamese professionals, particularly the differences between Western employers/managers and Vietnamese employees. We also presented the reasons why we selected these values, the differences between Western and Vietnamese culture embedded in these values and the factor analyses of the questionnaire, which resulted in all the underlying factors of those values. In the following section, we just briefly describe the definitions and the differentiations of these work-related values in Western and Vietnamese culture.

1.   Sense of time

Sense of time is the way people feel, experience, evaluate and use time (Venter, 2006). Different cultures have different orientation towards time, punctuality and pace of life. It is believed that Vietnamese and Westerners hold contrasting conception in the notion of time. The Westerners hold a narrow view of time which means they are punctual and usually stick to firm deadlines whereas the Vietnamese tend to keep flexible deadlines and focus on achieving the goals rather than on the time use (Kathryn, 2006; Kawar, 2012; Kvassov, 2003; Smith & Pham, 1996).

2. Participation in decision-making

"Researchers have conceptualized participative leadership as a component of individualized, Western societies" (Hannif, 2013, p. 6). Accordingly, employees in small power distance organizations (in Western countries) owe limited dependence on their superiors. They are frequently encouraged to ask for consultancy from superiors or participate in higher managers' decision-making processes (James, 2005). By contrast, in cultures with large power distance like Vietnam, there is a considerable dependence of employees on employers which means that decision-making is usually concentrated on authority and workers show a preference of "autocratic bosses" which means employees are willing to obey and conduct superiors' commands without any complaint (Chi, 2012; Hannif, 2013).

3. Open relationship with employers/managers

In a large power distance culture like Vietnam, there is a tendency of tall organization pyramids; thus the distance between employees and higher managers is definite and frequent contact between them is

scarce and higher management are highly respected by their staff (Hieu, 2013; Shaw, 2014). In contrast, in small power distance countries like Western countries, employees are generally comfortable approaching and interacting with their higher managers. They are expected to "bypass" their managers frequently for the sake of promptness and efficiency of their work performances (Kawar, 2012).

4. Face-concern

In Vietnamese culture, people's consciousness for face is extremely significant since Vietnamese people are high-context collectivists who are really scared of possible negative judgement of society on their behaviors resulting in loss of face. Therefore, the notion of self and other face-concern is quite influential in this culture (Pham, 2014). In Western culture, on the contrary, face is taken into account in terms of an individual's desire to be admired, approved of, free from imposition and freedom in doing what one wants. Accordingly, to those individualists, loss of face is not as crucial as one's self-achievement and they incline to fight for their own needs, success and promotions rather than keep a good face recognized by social acceptance (Pham, 2014).

5. Accountability

In Western culture, accountability is centralized around the "sense of self". People from this culture are highly aware of their own accountability at work and attuned to evaluate their own actions and deviations from their own standards (Gelfand, Lim & Raver, 2004). For this reason, in this culture, tasks given to employees are clearly defined and designated which means that they are held accountable for their performance regarding the tasks assigned to them. In Vietnamese culture, a collectivistic culture, in contrast, accountability rests with entire groups which signifies the connection of accountability to the entire group, not an individual (Gelfand et al., 2004). As a result, in this culture, employees can be given a specific task or project in a group and the group is usually hold accountable for the accomplishment of that project. They are still given an individual task; however, since they do not get used to being responsible for their own actions, they often suspend in making strong decisions and usually wait for the employers to decide for themselves so that severe consequences happening later might be avoided.

6. Work performance orientation

Autocratic leadership, in which, the management usually generate strong dominance over their employees and a lot of guidance from the management is basically performed, are generally seen in Vietnamese organizations (Hoang, 2015). Imprinted by Confucianism, the Vietnamese people are quite familiar with this kind of leadership. In contrast, Western employers normally perform work-performance orientation leadership which focuses on the employees' performance, innovativeness and fairness (Hoang, 2015). In other words, work-performance orientation leadership facilitates employees' advancement, idea generation, creativity, innovativeness, fair treatment and promotion.

3.2.5 Aim of the current study

The specific nature of intercultural communication issues in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures is still under-researched in the context of Southeast Asia and Vietnam. Moreover, new graduates in

Vietnam are ill-prepared for working in a multicultural context (Tran, 2012; Tran, 2015), even though most of these new workers are supposed to work in multinational organizations. With the view of improving and optimizing the communication between Western higher management and the host-national employees in those institutions as well as providing input for higher education educators to adapt their programs to support the prospective graduates in the development of intercultural communication skills at the workplace, in the current study, we examine issues that the Western employers/managers and Vietnamese employees face when they share the same working environment. The following questions direct our study:

1. What are the perceptions of Vietnamese employees towards communication in the workplace in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Vietnam?
2. What are the perceptions of Western employers/managers towards communication in the workplace in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Vietnam?

3.3   Method

3.3.1   Participants

47 foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures located in Ho Chi Minh city participated in this study. We searched for the companies' information on the Internet, using reports on the Global Trade in Customer Language website (http://eu.ecizi.com). We also searched for companies using the researchers' networks. We collected the companies' information; then we sent emails, phoned or visited the companies in person to ask for their permission to carry out our research at those companies. The informed consent was sent to the Director Board and Personnel Department of each company. Field work schedule was from April to August, 2015. One of the authors conducted this field work in Ho Chi Minh city. The first author contacted 47 companies. These 47 companies participated in a previous quantitative study. From these, 21 agreed to participate in this qualitative study. This resulted into the participation of 11 Western employers/managers (from various European countries as well as from the United States: 10 males, age range 28-55 years of age and at least two years experience managing Vietnamese employees) and 33 Vietnamese employees (30 females, age range 20-45 years of age and 1 to 10 years experience working in a foreign company) working in foreign subsidiaries and joint-ventures in Ho Chi Minh city.

3.3.2   Data collection

In the present study, we carried out semi-structured interviews to explore what and how professionals from two cultures experienced in their cross-cultural communication in work situations. We aimed to gain an insightful view into the problems they encountered when interacting with their cross-cultural counterparts.

The first author visited the companies to ask for permission to conduct the interviews. All the interviews were conducted and recorded by the visiting researcher but at different places in accordance with the participants' preferences. The interview took about thirty minutes to one and a half hour for each participant depending on the participant's time availability. Notes were taken during and after the interviews to retain any insights gained or questions raised. Any follow-up inquiries were done by phone calls or emails to the respondents. The visiting author transcribed all the recorded interviews together with the assistance of the notes jotted down.

The interviews were semi-structured so that the interviewer could ask for further ideas in need. The interviewer started the interview by elaborating on the description of the research project and the interview procedure. Afterwards, the interviewee had some time to read through the interview questions before they answered. The questions composed many probing questions including two introduction questions, one main question and four follow-up questions. All the questions were employed to assist the participants to relate their experiences comprising of (1) their interests when working in the current company, (2) their opinions about intercultural communication with their cross-cultural counterparts, (3) the problems or incidents they faced during the interactional process, what was done and how they fixed the problems and (4) their expectations from their cross-cultural partners. The interviewer also had a checklist in order to check again some topics that the interviewee missed to relate in his/her conversation. See for the form of the interview questions sent to the interviewees in Appendix 2.

3.3.3 Data analysis

The data were firstly transcribed and secondly translated into English by the visiting author. This procedure was done for the first two interviews and these first two English transcriptions were checked by all the research group members for appropriate protocols. Afterwards, the rest of the data were respectively done in the same procedure. These transcriptions were coded in within-case manner first and then in across cases. We used the following six cultural dimensions that are based on a quantitative study (Chapter 2) and presented in the theoretical framework as start for our analyses: 1) *sense of time*, 2) *participation in decision-making*, 3) *open relationship with employers/managers*, 4) *face-concern*, 5) *accountability* and 6) *work-performance orientation* (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1
The cultural dimensions

Cultural Dimensions	Definition
1. **Sense of time**	The way people feel, experience, evaluate and use time.
2. **Participation in decision-making**	The extent to which decision-making between higher managers and employees in the work situation is joint or shared.
3. **Open relationship with employers/managers**	The extent of intimacy or closeness in daily communication in the workplace of employers and employees.
4. **Face-concern**	The extent to which one's performance in an interpersonal context is recognized by others through their social position and prestige.
5. **Accountability**	This concept can be delineated as how much self-accountability the employees perform in their daily work situations and how much the employers evaluate and control their employees' accountability in daily work situations.
6. **Work-performance orientation**	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence. This notion implies the employers' facilitation of their employee's advancement, idea generation, creativity and innovativeness.

The data were analyzed in the following steps. First, each within-case matrix included all text segments was coded according to the above six dimensions and reviewed by all research group

members for agreement. Second, from each within-case, two cross-case matrices were extracted, one for the employers and one for the employees. This step was also checked by all the research group members. Eventually, the extracted representative cases were put in a table with 6 themes of the cultural dimensions for comparing the differences between the employers and employees. We chose to employ cross-case analysis since this way of analyzing the data enabled us to aggregate across cases, draw out generalizations or common communication problems that the participants faced.

3.4 Results and discussion

Both perspectives (employers and employees) on communication between the Western managers and the Vietnamese employees seem to complement each other, in which the differences are due to both cultural and status differences. There were many concerns and problematic issues in the Western managers' viewpoints centralizing around (1) *lack of communication* and (2) *lack of autonomy in getting work done and motivation in professional development*. Those expatriates complained that while working with the Vietnamese, they encounter several issues that they do not face when collaborating with their home-country partners. Nevertheless, from the Vietnamese employees' side, there were not many concerns brought about and the negative points were not frequently mentioned. They clearly stated that they have good and satisfying relationships with their higher managers. Accordingly, it seems that there are contrasting perceptions from the interlocutors of two distinguished cultures. We analyzed both the Vietnamese employees and Western higher managers' viewpoints regarding six cultural dimensions and other issues that the participants concerned with illustrating examples as follows.

3.4.1 Sense of time

The Western managers often blame the Vietnamese employees for deadline tardiness and suppressing the truth about their lateness whereas the Vietnamese employees confirmed that they have used their working time flexibly and that they should be more conscious of keeping the deadlines. The following comments highlight both the Vietnamese employees' and Western employers' sentiments.
The Vietnamese employees talked about how time should be practiced:
Vietnamese employees: "*It is not important to be late for work but you have to know how to handle your time to reach the deadlines*".
"*We have relaxing working time and our managers respect for our private life; however being on time for meetings and keeping the deadlines are very significant and we are always aware of our actions*".
The Western employers expressed their concerns about their employees' lateness for deadlines:
Western employers: "*I asked my employees whether they finish their tasks, they always say "yes" to please me although they have not finished yet*".
As we already mentioned in the framework that the Vietnamese collectivists always try to keep harmony and cooperative spirit (Taras, Piers & Bradley, 2011), the situation of avoiding conflicts frequently happens to them when they endeavor to please their employers. They would rather tell a lie that they finish the assignments than upset their superiors. Nevertheless, being under the impression that their way of working is right, they put themselves in a converse situation.

3.4.2 Participation in decision-making

The Vietnamese employees seem to be very positive when they can voice their ideas to the managers while the Western employers show their frustration because they believe that the Vietnamese are too limited in words and opinions and do not contribute many ideas for the working process.

The Vietnamese employees showed their positive attitudes towards having a voice in their companies:

One Vietnamese employee remarked: "*Compared to my former and local companies, I have a voice here and I have been fairly treated. My employer always listens to my ideas, suggestions and proposals. I can freely propose and talk about my viewpoints. I am more open since I have been working in this company*".

The Western employers expressed their irritation for their employees' lack of opinion contribution to the organization:

One Western employer related: "*I always encourage my employees to take their own decisions and correct their own mistakes. Vietnamese people tend to say "yes" all the time even when they do not understand anything, they still say "yes". I prefer people to say "no" and propose things to me. Vietnamese people do not take any strong decisions and always wait for the boss to make decisions for them. I always seek for advice from my staff because I am not perfect. I have to say that I spend lots of time and energy working with Vietnamese*".

3.4.3 Open relationship with the employers/managers

The Western managers criticize that the Vietnamese employees are very cold and keep a great distance with their higher managers; yet, most of the local employees confirmed that they get along well with their employers although some of them did say that they are afraid of their higher managers and keep a distance with them.

The Vietnamese employees talked positively about their relationship with their foreign employers:

One Vietnamese employee revealed: "*I have a very good relationship with my employer. I feel comfortable working with him. He is a very flexible person and a good listener*".

Although others talked about their timidity when they need to contact their employers:

One Vietnamese employee said: "*My employer is quite patient and sociable. He always patiently clarified if I did not understand him. He is always annoyed if we do not understand but said "Yes". He is ready to make things clear; so if we do not understand, just say "no" and ask for his explanation or clarification. He is also a very flexible person. However, I myself still feel afraid whenever I meet to discuss something with him*".

The Western managers illustrated their employees' shyness:

One Western employer stated: "*I never close my door so that my employees can approach me any time when they have questions or problems. Opening the door signals my mental and physical openness to my employees. However, they rarely dare to reach me in my office. My employees should not over-respect me and should not keep the distance with me because of these over-respecting behaviors*".

The reason for the Vietnamese employees' hesitation to raise their voice and reduce the distance with their managers is the impact of hierarchy or power distance. In organizations, power distance is associated with the extent of hierarchy or level of participation in decisions (Frederic & Hirsch, 1994; Merkin, 2006; Weiss, Kolbe, Grote, Spahn & Grande, 2016). Merkin (2006) also argued that power distance does influence facework strategies in face-threatening situations, especially in large power-distance culture because in this culture, the preservation of face is dependent upon hierarchical

structure and any breakdown or threat of breakdowns in such a hierarchy is face threatening. For this reason, power distance decides the kind of communication people in collectivistic cultures convey. Apparently, Merkin (2006) found that large power distance members use more indirect facework or indirect communication than their small power distance counterparts. They never show tense emotions over relationships and often keep silent because they wish to be safe in face-threatening situations. Accordingly, in many incidents, the small power distance members like the Western employers in this case feel quite uncomfortable because of their counterparts' reticence and vague conversations.

3.4.4   Face-concern

The Vietnamese employees express their preference for the open and direct communication style of their Western higher managers despite the fact that their managers show the irritation for their Vietnamese staff's indirectness and hesitance in communication which might hamper the working process.

The Vietnamese employees confided their employers' openness and directness in communication:

One Vietnamese employee said: "*She is very open and direct. We always have open and direct conversation. When she disagrees, she tells us directly what she disagrees about. She can use many bad words to scold us but she always let us talk against her about what we are thinking. There are arguments but the purposes of those arguments are to solve the problems in a direct and constructive manner*".

The Western employers talked about their employees' indirectness in conversations due to their scare of face loss:

One employer related: "*They just response "Yes yes or no no". Especially when they make mistakes, they always keep silent. In Vietnam, people concern a lot about losing face. People tend to say "yes" a lot to please the hearer. For instance, I asked my employees whether they finish their tasks, they always say "yes" to please me although they have not finished yet. I think it is also because of "loss of face" that makes people tend to say "yes". I am very direct and easy to get frustrated because Vietnamese people are not clear in their conversation. They tend to say lies but it is not their intention to lie. It is just because they did not understand and they did not know what to do but they don't dare to speak out*".

Consistent with the findings from the previous quantitative study (Chapter 2), the results signify that the Western higher managers fully showed their Western characteristics in their conversations. All things are explicitly and apparently stated. They directly expressed their perceived botheration and appreciation for the counterparts' attitudes and behaviors. Also, in the interviews, many Western managers emphasized that Vietnamese people do not show bad things out. Those higher managers confirmed that their Vietnamese employees always come to the managers with good news and when they face downsides, they just keep those drawbacks as secrets and solve the problems by themselves. This finding correlates with a famous spiritual saying in Vietnamese "Tốt khoe, xấu che", which literally means "displaying good things and covering bad things" (Pham, 2014). The Western higher managers also complained that if the problems were satisfactorily solved, it would be fine but if the problems were not settled and became too serious, the Western employers would recognize them and found out it was too late to fix them.

In addition, the interviews revealed that problem of language in communication were realized from both sides. Both the Western managers and Vietnamese employees confirmed that language can hamper the smooth communication for two parties. This is also one of the rationale for the lack of communication from the Vietnamese employees. The Vietnamese employees confirmed that they feel

uneasy and not confident when they do not have enough language competence. It is pointed out that lack of a shared language is the largest and persistent barrier to intercultural communication and people would be highly anxious over communication if they feel that they are not competent enough and would be assessed on their weakness (Peltokorpi & Clausen, 2010; Weng, 2015). Additionally, the Vietnamese people are not rigorously trained to think critically in order to make questions and give appropriate feedback. This contributes to their hesitation in engaging in the conversations with their cross-cultural employers.

3.4.5 Accountability

The Western employers complained that Vietnamese employees are not self-responsible in their work and need micromanagement most of the time. The Western managers also concerned for their employees' lack of motivation to get promotion on their career. On the other hand, the Vietnamese employees confirmed that their employers seek for responsibility and accuracy from them. However, one employee showed her annoyance when her employer frequently complained that the Vietnamese staff work in a Vietnamese style implying that Vietnamese people lack self-accountability and usually needs being directed. She disagreed with her employer and told him that compared to the salary that he pays to his native workers, the Vietnamese staff receive less than that; thus, why he asks for the same working level as his home-country employees do.

The Vietnamese employees disclosed their employers' working style:

One employee said: "*My employer is a careful person and he always has judgement on the final product of his employees; thus he always demands us to work at our best. We have to adapt to his style a little bit*".

One Vietnamese employee expressed her perception towards her employer's criticism about Vietnamese workers:

She said: "*Another misunderstanding occurred when my boss usually said that we worked in a Vietnamese style. I disagreed with him and told him that you need cheap labor; then you came to Vietnam to work with us; the salary we received is much cheaper than it is in your country. Therefore, you should not criticize us in that way*".

The Western employers talked about Vietnamese people' working style and how they mold their employees into regulations:

One employer revealed: "*People in Vietnam are too tightly attached to their family and they are hugely supported by their family and spend lots of time taking care of their family; therefore, they are not motivated to fight for their career. People may read newspaper, go out for coffee, chat or even sleep during working hours. However, I cannot push them too much and challenge them too much. The effects can be even worse if I impose strong penalty on them. Therefore, I should lead, motivate, encourage and discuss with them in a soft voice. I will give them time first and mold them into our regulations later. I try to build up trust among us and when trust is established, things can be easily worked out*".

3.4.6 Work-performance orientation

The Western managers demonstrate their disappointment for the local employees' lack of innovation, reluctance to new things, changes and challenges while Vietnamese employees contended that their managers readily accept new things and help them to advance a lot in their profession.

The Vietnamese employees talked positively about their employers' open-mindedness:

One employee remarked: "*I really respect and value my relationship with my employer now since he gives me opportunities to develop and improve myself. When trust is built up between us, I can propose my ideas to change or create new things. I feel that I am not restricted in a narrow view in my profession. Compared to Vietnamese employers, my employer is more open and ready to accept changes*".

The Western employers complained of their employees' resistance to changes and passive working style:

Two employers said: ""*Vietnamese look at only one target; they cannot look at two targets at the same time or to look for many alternatives. My employees should have their own way to keep the clients; they should not depend only on me for the company networks*".

"*People here stay resistant to changes. In contrast, in our Western culture, we like new things and challenges*".

The Western employers indicated that the Vietnamese people are tightly attached to their family. They generally set their family the first priority, which might have as side-effect that they do not struggle for their career. One of the common complaint from foreign managers that Vietnamese employees usually take days off for weddings, funerals, death anniversaries, family visit or family problems, which makes the employers quite annoyed and frustrated. The employers substantiated that the local employees do not take their whole-hearted enthusiasm for their job because they are distracted by many other activities.

Another reason for the Vietnamese employees' inadequacy for autonomy and getting promotion is lack of work independence. Work independence does make for a more committed and motivated employee. However, the Western employers realized that the Vietnamese employees do not shape their own work independence due to the influence of the educational system and culture and they need their managers to mold them into regulations all the times. This might make the foreign managers quite unhappy.

The final reason for this difference and complaint is the differences in working style due to cultural dissimilarities and the employers' over-expectation from their employees. The Western employers come to Vietnam with the ideal idea to rearrange a new world for their subsidiaries by bringing their country's ideology into a new and incomparable context. On the other hand, the local employees are quite overwhelmed when the new style of the Western employers is speedily experimented. Thus, sometimes, in their haste to accomplish things, the employers' adaptation may fail and they cannot reach their goals.

Accordingly, in regard to the same story, the picture was differently depicted since it was portrayed by two paradoxical ideologists. It seems that intercultural communication is intensely affected by the cultural context and how to handle it is still an unsolved question. With all the information provided, we desire to uncover the mysterious question in order to assist foreign managers as well as the local employees to achieve their aims in their cross-cultural professional environment.

3.5   Implications

The results indicate the main concerns in intercultural communication between Western higher managers and Vietnamese employees, which is a significant source for the improvement of intercultural communication in outsourcing companies and joint-ventures. In the following text, we discuss some recommendations for communication enhancement through leveraging the cultural differences. The findings suggest that pre-departure adaptation is a good preparation for expatriates' later adjustment and on-site training is significant for both the foreigners and host country nationals

(Peltokorpi, 2010). It is important that the companies together with the universities play active roles in supplying those communicative cross-cultural training so that culture-based misunderstandings and negative stereotypes can be diminished. During coaching, the following issues should be addressed.

Trust establishment

The interviews in this study gained insights into how the Western managers successfully communicate with their Vietnamese employees by building trust. Most of the higher managers confirmed that problems can be worked out when their employees trust them. When trust is established, the power distance is reduced and employees are more open to share and contribute. Scheduling face to face meetings and informal social events is a way to build trust and solve the problems since the employees have chances to communicate to their managers through informal, clear and explicit conversations.

Planning

Being well-prepared contributes to eighty percent of success. One manager noted down that Vietnamese employees normally cannot reach their goals and deadlines due to their unplanned actions. Therefore, in order to ensure work progress, the local employees should learn to set up a specific and detailed plan for each task assigned. They should be trained to develop this skill at universities, for example by organizing plans for their study project. Educators should stimulate their awareness of the importance of developing those plans during their work lifetime in the study programs.

In the role of management, the Western employers should micromanage, supervise their employees' plans and observe every step taken so that immediate actions can be taken for any delays or cessations. Then, conflicts can be avoided because of miscommunications about work progress and failures of keeping the deadlines.

Fortifying work independence

Vietnamese people are perceived as not highly autonomous in their work because they prefer more structured and paternalistic relationships which involves being clearly instructed and requiring initiative supervision (Taras, Piers & Bradley, 2011), they should be coached to take initiative roles at universities in their daily study and other school activities. More work simulated situations and projects should be instructed and conducted by the students to help them get accustomed to the intercultural context.

Besides, both the Western managers and Vietnamese employees can be trained to establish their employees' work independence. The managers, as mentors, should scaffold this procedure. After that, they may slowly decrease or take out the scaffolds. Following are some simple ways that some managers already used for scaffolding and found them effective:
- Micromanaging the employees by observing their schedules and their work progress.
- Arranging two-way communication with the local employees via face-to-face meetings, phone calls or emails. With this kind of management, information can be updated and the employees can express in time their opinions and concerns and receive the feedback and advice from the management. The employees themselves also found that two-way communication is very effective to work out the problems.
- Providing regular professional training (once in a month, two or three months) within the companies as a Human Resource Management strategy that the Western higher managers

already employed is a very convincing way to promote the employees' autonomy because the employees are trained to acquire not only necessary and useful skills for their profession but also the skills to be independent in their work.

3.6   Limitations

The first limitation is that there was not much negative information obtained from the Vietnamese employees. Imprinted by the culture, specifically power distance, the Vietnamese professionals are usually reluctant to offer straight and downside information about their managers (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Jacqui & Tran, 2009; Pham, 2014). They did not straightly express their grievances and they seemed to provide quite good and neutral information. Even many Western managers emphasized that Vietnamese people do not show bad things out; they generally come to the managers with good news and when they face downsides, they just keep the information as secrets and solve the problems by themselves. Therefore, in order to catch the real image of their intercultural communication with their Western higher managers, we used many probing questions. Further research may also use observational tools to gain more behavioral examples from their workplaces.

The second limitation is the gender issue in which nearly almost the managers are males whereas most of the employees are females; however, we cannot separate them. Thus, the power distance is doubled which might make a bigger difference between them. In order to work this out, we suggest that further research may choose the foreign companies with balanced number of male and female employees and employers so that more valid data can be obtained.

3.7   Conclusion

In closing, cultural differences might bring several issues to the workplace if there is no preparation for the consequences. Knowledge and experiences in intercultural communication and management are indispensable for cultural awareness. Cultural distance has been recognized not only by its disadvantages but also its benefits. In fact, multinational organizations have been proved to enjoy many benefits when entering the world market if people understand the ways to manipulate those precious assets (Hasan, Mehmet & Demet, 2014). With the useful information collected in this study, contribution to the intercultural communication research body can be made by creating a manual for composing intercultural communication curricular not only for higher education training but also for employee and employer coaching.