



# Reflection on knowledge transfer methodologies in Eastern/Western European co-operations

Knowledge transfer methodologies

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – In order to win the global race for innovation as a source for competitive advantage, many companies enter into any kind of business co-operation. Beyond intending to grow merely quantitatively, co-operation partners should target to commonly create new knowledge and to transfer knowledge as a basis for qualitative growth. This apparent deficiency of practitioners is compounded by a lack of theory and empirical research on intercultural knowledge transfer. This task becomes even more daunting, when co-operation partners transcend borders, and the knowledge transfer process becomes impacted by national cultures. This paper aims to present empirical research that illuminates the effects which national cultures have on the transfer of knowledge between Central/Eastern Europe (CEE) using Russia as a case study, and Western European partners.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper applies a phenomenological approach applying grounded theory for data generation and analysis. The research method is a case study, and as research techniques 11 interviews with senior Russian managers and academics were conducted and three participant observation events in Russian settings were chosen. The researchers applied a fundamental shift from a mere comparative study of cultural differences to the study of interactions.

**Findings** – This stage of the research presents a reflection on Eastern perceptions on Western knowledge transfer methodologies related mainly to the content of the knowledge as well as the attitudes when transferring knowledge. In addition, a self-reflection on the characteristics of the Russian knowledge receivers is provided.

**Research limitations/implications** – Limitations of this research refer to a lack of differentiation as to ownership, type of co-operation, company size or industry type. It has to be underlined that the focus of the research was to concentrate on the holistic problems that were not sufficiently addressed in previous research. On this basis more specific and differentiated further research can be conducted.

**Originality/value** – This research aimed to develop an understanding of why Eastern and Western European partners experience different barriers when transferring and receiving knowledge and provides recommendations to overcome the barriers. It facilitates an understanding of the feelings and obstacles in the learning process between Russian and Western European partners serving as a reflective and eye-opening starting point for urgently required theory generation and change of attitudes. The paper contributes to the development of a coherent body of knowledge in the field. Contemporary authors criticise the lack of research on a dyadic level and theory on intercultural knowledge transfer. This research addresses these shortcomings by having selected respondents that are currently involved in Eastern/Western co-operations and by comparing Eastern and Western perspectives at a later research stage.

**Keywords** Teaching methods, Cross-cultural management, Knowledge transfer, Russia, Western Europe

**Paper type** Case study



## 1. Introduction

To understand, master and, most importantly, capitalise on the diversity of different cultures many scholars have devoted a substantial amount of time conducting cross-cultural studies. Cultural dimensions having resulted from these studies can be grouped into the political/economic, social/cultural environmental components or into organisational cultural variables with each of them providing an understanding of general behaviour. However, they are lacking a specific focus on the interaction of intercultural learning and knowledge transfer (KT) methodologies, content and intercultural knowledge creation attitudes, which are very important for intercultural business co-operation. This research aims to develop an understanding of why Eastern and Western European partners experience different barriers when transferring and receiving knowledge and to provide recommendations to overcome the barriers.

In this context, Gupta and Govindarajan (in Holden, 2002), Apfelthaler (1998) and Schoenberg (1999, in Holden, 2002) emphasise that both conceptual work and empirical evidence are in their embryonic stage. More specifically, Jaeger (in Bolton, 1999) stresses the importance of a synergistic technique being beyond present cultural distinctions explicitly synthesising cultural dimensions into future models of trans-national management education, a subject, which is regarded by Apfelthaler (1998) as having been researched only in its very early stages, for example, in the German speaking countries. Furthermore, Schlegelmilch and Chini (2003, in Holden and Tansley, 2007a, p. 315) stressed “the urgent need for a comprehensive model that provides a more holistic view of intra-organisational, inter-cultural knowledge transfer”. Finally, in a more recent research Riege (2007, p. 2) concluded, stressing that “... there is very little empirical evidence that suggests likely managerial actions or gives evidence about how to overcome diverse knowledge transfer barriers and the effectiveness of those actions...”.

This paper facilitates an understanding about the feelings and obstacles in the learning process between Russian and Western European partners, serving as a reflective and eye-opening starting point for urgently required theory generation and change of attitudes.

## 2. Literature gap

Although strategic alliances can be regarded as “the best model for managing diversity” (Schneider and Barsoux, 2003, p. 275), many writers confirm that academia, so far, could not provide satisfactory solutions to remedy inaccurate and inefficient transferability of intercultural KT, to fully exploit opportunities offered by diversity and to overcome serious current gaps in cross-cultural co-operations (Cyr and Schneider, 1996; Bartholomew and Adler in Holden, 2002; Gill and Butler, 1996; Szulansky in O’dell, 1998; Woodrow and Tamulionyte-Lentz, 2000; Shaw, 2001; Cornuel and Kletz, 2001; Davenport and Prusak in Holden, 2002; Clark and Geppert, 2002; Holden, 2002; Lang and Steger, 2002). Referring to a variety of failures of international mergers and acquisitions described in literature, Holden (2002, p. 315) regards the “failures in the cross-cultural interchange of knowledge” as the reason for this deplorable development.

The term knowledge “is very often mixed with insights, intuitions, assumptions, opinions and even prejudices” (Raich, 2000, p. 199). This knowledge is created in each individual mind although very often is influenced by societal norms, common practices

or organisational cultures. Because of these influences, Raich (2000) criticises that many authors do not take into account defining the meaning of knowledge and assume that other people will understand this widely used term in the same way. Additionally, he underlines that knowledge has meaning only in a defined context and, if this context is changed, its transfer can be perturbed and might originate misunderstanding, misinterpretations or even resistance to learn it. Concurrently, Child and Markoczy (1993, p. 11) point to detrimental implications of flawed learning methodologies on cognitive change and personal acceptance: “the term forced refers to how learning is brought about and not necessarily to how the process is perceived by those on the receiving end”. Supporting this criticism, Matlay (2001, p. 3) questions the effectiveness of knowledge transfer in case the knowledge is only “imported from the West and applied to local circumstance with little if any thought as to its relevance or effectiveness”.

Referring to the KT literature gap, Holden (2002) and Easterby-Smith (1997) confirm that organisational learning with an international and cross-cultural perspective is an under-researched area. The first scholar named this under-researched area as the grand lacunae. He further investigated concepts embracing cross-cultural collaborative learning, knowledge sharing and networking being vital concepts for cross-cultural knowledge transfer and management. He conducted the research shown in Table I based on databases, clearly showing the gap in literature.

Ford and Chan (2003) argue that research has been carried out in knowledge management and separately in cross-cultural issues, but no literature is available related to the intersection of both. Accordingly, Zhu (2004, p. 75) underlines the need for empirical research focusing on “comparative panoramas on the root, internal logic, functioning, effect and problematic in and cross diverse cultural-institutional settings”. Focussing on CEE countries, Lang and Steger (2002) identified serious shortcomings in social scientific research on KT, recommending a new approach.

### 3. Methodology

This research aims to facilitate KT between Eastern and Western partners in international co-operation focusing mainly on the identification of problems faced by trans-national managers when transferring knowledge. A phenomenological approach is highly recommended because the majority of the sources and suggestions identified in literature call for a naturalist mode of inquiry being lacking in positivistic

Source of data	Findings	Total
ABI/Inform, MCB Emerald 1,000 mainstream management and related journals from 1998- 2002 130 MCB Journals in management topics from 1967-2000	<i>ABI/Inform</i>	
	Cross/intercultural learning	1
	Cross/intercultural networking	0
	Cross/intercultural knowledge sharing	0
	<i>MBC Emerald</i>	
	Cross/intercultural learning	1
Cross/intercultural networking	0	
Cross/intercultural knowledge sharing	0	

**Source:** Based on Holden (2002) adapted by the authors

**Table I.**  
Existing literature gap

approaches. Furthermore, a phenomenological approach tries to understand social realities, which are based on people's experiences and the meanings attached to them, by analysing social and human interaction and perceiving tacit knowledge.

Qualitative research embraces interpretative techniques which try to describe, decode and translate to focus on understanding of organisational processes rather than on frequency and prediction (Gilmore and Carson, 1996; Lee, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Clark and Geppert, 2002; Lyst, 2005). This is regarded to be crucial for the understanding of tacit knowledge. Finally, qualitative research is seen to be suited better for theory creation compared to quantitative research methods focusing more on theory testing.

#### *Research design*

The research was designed in three stages. The first stage was a secondary research based on a comprehensive literature review. This step was not conducted to develop any theoretical framework but to increase the researchers' familiarity with the research setting and was also used to explore which data collection methods were most appropriate for the study.

Representing the second stage, primary research was qualitatively conducted using the case study method and the techniques of participant and overt observation, and in-depth interviews because "all of them are methods that allowed the researcher to respond to emerging themes and to the particular characteristics each of the cases" (Daengbuppha *et al.*, 2006, p. 3).

In the final stage an interactive discussion between the Eastern and Western findings took place. The result of this confronted views and perceptions led finally to an intercultural knowledge transfer model. This paper presents the findings of the first empirical stage providing the Eastern European and Russian perspective.

#### *Research methods*

Related to the case study Yin (2002), Tellis (1997) and Salkind (2006) explain that the case study method fulfils the three parts of a qualitative method: describing, understanding and explaining.

Participant observation implies the active participation of the researcher in the social network (Salkind, 2006). Gil and Johnson (1991) emphasise this intensive involvement of the researcher and stress that, by diving into the matter, the researchers share their experiences with those of the sample resulting not only in observation, but also in real feelings towards the problem at hand.

Overall, grounded theory was applied for data generation and analysis. It is defined as "an inductive approach to research that focuses on social interaction and relies heavily on data from interviews and observations to build theory grounded in data rather than to test theory or simply describe empirical phenomena" (Darkenwald, 2005, p. 1). All interviews were transcribed with double spacing and wide margins for notes during the coding stage. Each participant was given a number code which will be seen on the findings' presentation, e.g. R1 – respondent number 1.

#### *Sampling and sample size*

For the grounded theory approach theoretical sampling was applied gathering incidents, anecdotes, activities and events to develop theory that is grounded in data

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(Strauss, 1987). Daengbuppha *et al.* (2006, p. 3) hold that theoretical sampling “speeds the analysis and reveals opportunities for adjustments to the data collection methods as well as identifying the stage at which data saturation has been reached”. Cresswell (1998) suggests that a sample size of ten might be regarded sufficient for a qualitative case study. As participant observation constituted an additionally applied research technique, the sample size of 11 in-depth interviews was regarded as adequate to reach the saturation stage. The sample consisted of four Russian managers, one Ukrainian and one Croatian manager, as well as five senior Russian academics currently involved in business and educational Eastern/Western co-operations. The interviews lasted between 60 minutes to 75 minutes respectively. The participant observation event refers to the organisation and participation in two academic conferences in St Petersburg and one seminar taught by a Russian professor in economics.

#### **4. Russian and Eastern European research findings**

The countries of Russia and Eastern Europe are increasingly involved in the internationalisation process. Many cross-border business co-operations between Western and Eastern European companies are occurring and, in their wave, the important movement of know-how (knowledge) has become fundamental. Each partner of the international co-operation brings its own national and corporate culture to the table, which often results in a difficult and complex problem in the implementation phase. For the daily activities of the companies, the smooth transfer of knowledge is a pre-condition for the co-operation’s sustainable success.

The researchers observed that all the respondents, based on own experience, reflected a clear understanding of what transfer of knowledge across cultures in terms of cultural complexity entails. Unanimous agreements as to the reasons for failure, factors to improve and attitudes to change have been elicited and reached the saturation stage. Because of the length limitation of the paper, only the category “methodology” is discussed in more depth.

Figure 1 presents the emerging dimensions, categories and sub-categories resulting from the axial coding following the steps of grounded theory. Later, Figures 2-4 and narratives explain the meaning of each part (inappropriate methodology, appropriate methodology and knowledge receiver characteristics) in more detail.

Figure 2 focuses on the sub-category “Inappropriate methodologies” and provides a more detailed description of its properties and dimensions.

Two major considerations emerged in this category. One refers to the content, as to what to transfer in order to get this new knowledge accepted. The other relates to the attitudes of the knowledge transmitter in the transfer process in order to increase the like-hood (later addressed) of both the knowledge transmitter and the knowledge receiver for a real understanding and cognitive learning.

#### *Knowledge alienation*

The term “knowledge alienation”, as named by the researchers, refers here to the distance related to a personal identification with this knowledge and a lack of connection with it. In this context, the perception of the Eastern European respondents in terms of knowledge alienation relates to the meaninglessness of the Western knowledge for the Russian context.

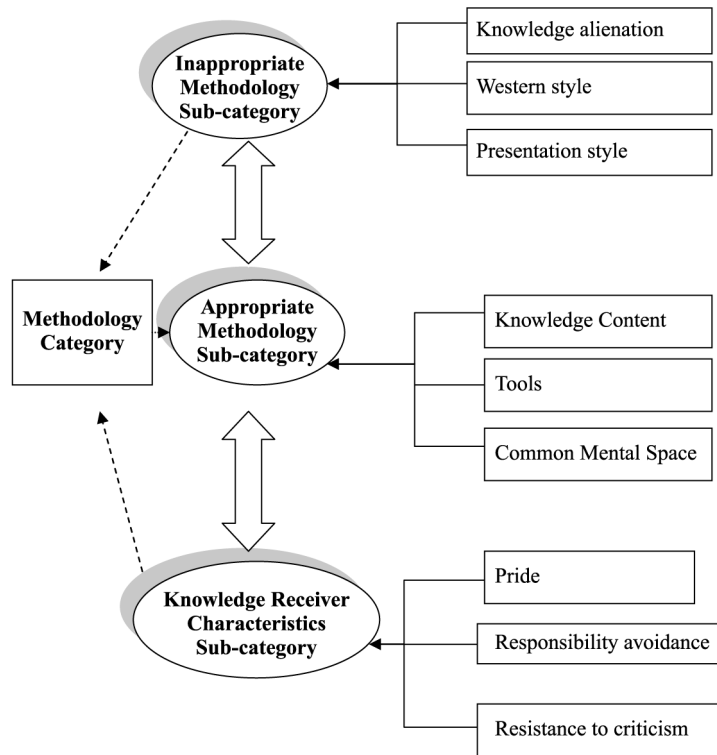


Figure 1.  
Teaching methodology

Emerging properties, dimensions and sub-categories from axial coding II

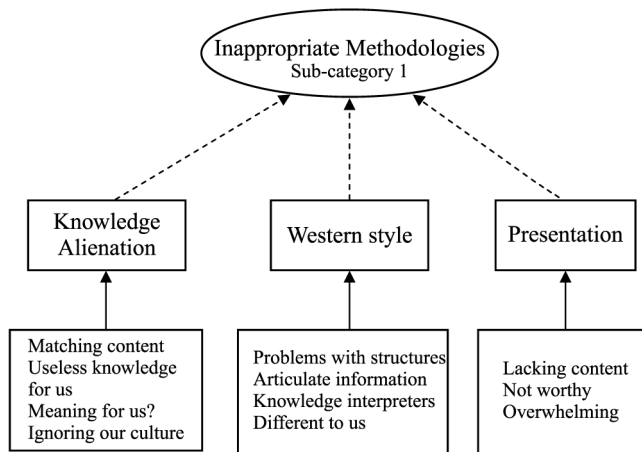
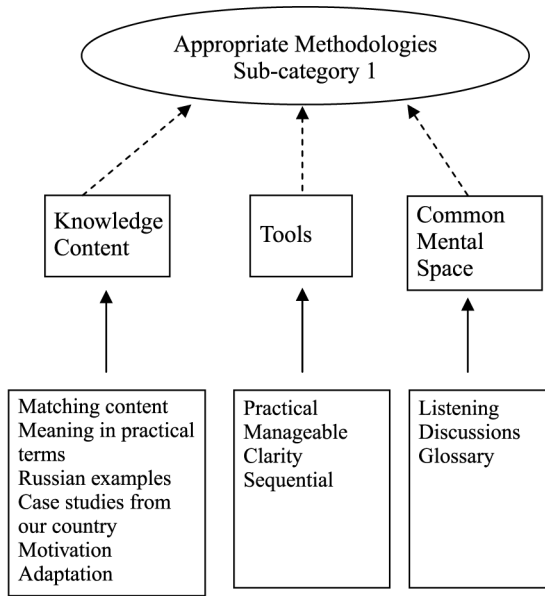


Figure 2.  
Inappropriate methodologies

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**Emerging properties, dimensions and sub-categories from axial coding II**

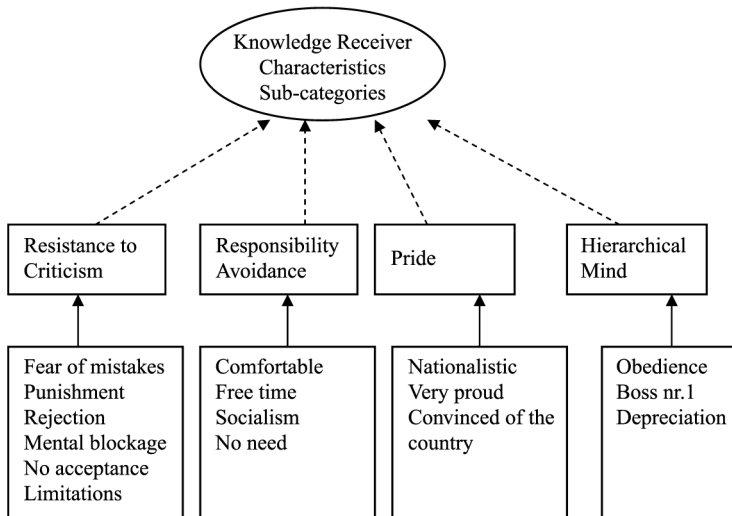


Knowledge transfer methodologies

**Figure 3.**  
Appropriate methodologies

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**Emerging properties, dimensions and sub-categories from axial coding II**



**Figure 4.**  
Knowledge receiver characteristics

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During the interviews repeatedly the sentence “relate knowledge to Russian reality” was expressed. The respondents stressed that just getting Western examples was not very motivating for them because it did not fit with the Russian reality. R2 explained:

[...] if they think this concept doesn't fit for Russians, you immediately loose them.

When they do not feel proximity with the new knowledge, in terms of its immediate applicability to the Russian context, they feel an alienation from this new knowledge. In the same vein, R5 criticised Western lectures for lacking knowledge about their Russian culture and therefore, “for us it is just useless”.

A personal viewpoint of a Russian student R36 participating in a Western Masters program tried to clarify why sometimes Western knowledge is not applicable for them leading to knowledge alienation:

[...] in double accounting and grey schemes, it was pointless to try to introduce Western standards. Also, the program is too focused on global companies and multinationals, while most of the students come from small and medium-sized firms.

#### *Western style*

Some Russian educational institutions are dealing with Western educational institutions in order to develop new programs, course content and business literature. They identified problems in term of extreme Western nationalism by treating Russian students as part of their culture. Special problems were mentioned when dealing with French institutions, being national-focused and ignoring the Russian partner and their culture. R3 stressed:

[...] they think the French culture is the best, they are not interested in Russian cases.

Once more, this Western behaviour ignoring the Russian interest produced knowledge alienation and a certain rejection of the partnership. At a later stage, she indicated a positive acceptance in the case of co-operation with German institutions, as those would understand the need for this adaptation and integration of the Russian environment. Accordingly, R1 clarified:

German approaches are more practical and more useful for marketing.

In terms of knowledge content, positive efforts are being made to improve the KT, but a lot of room for improvement still exists as to how the transfer should be implemented (R3, R1, R7, R8).

#### *Presentation*

Additional to the knowledge content, Western presentation styles were strongly criticised, as being overwhelming in design but lacking content as R2 explained:

[...] power point presentations with very extreme sophisticated models are not worth the paper where they are printed on.

This style seems to irritate the Russians and to be very provocative for them, leading to face resistance when learning or, even more, mocking about their counterparts. R2 explained that Russians working for American companies joke about their training techniques mainly done by:



[...] putting them on a chain of workshops, brainstorming and then list them with power point presentations, giving only one message “your client is always right”.

Additional criticism relates to lecturing content (R1, R2), indicating that Russian students learn more from Russian lectures as these would be more content dense rather than applying “artistic hi-tech power point presentations”. Being used to this intensive lecture content, students and parents have high expectations regarding Western lecturers, as R1 articulated:

Our students compare lectures and the parents pay to learn and they learn practical knowledge.

The problem that the knowledge content does not fit with the Russian expectation coupled with the sophisticated power point presentations from Western lecturers originates a negative attitude and reduces the motivation for learning. Therefore, these two aspects have to be taken into account when transferring knowledge striking a balance between being both, practical and relevant to Russians (R2).

On the occasion of the first conference in St Petersburg, the researchers had the opportunity to speak with an academic from Western Europe (R7) and exchanged comments about the Russian presentations during the conference. It should be mentioned that Russian presenters hardly used slides or power point presentations, and all of them spoke in Russian being used to simultaneous interpretation for the non-Russian speakers. One of his comments was that the presentations were like expert talks. He further identified some advantages in those types of presentations compared with the Western ones:

European presentations are cut down to the smallest specific thing, and nobody stands back to give the big picture, politicians and practitioners being precise isolated because they make this microscopic analysis of one little piece of the puzzle.

Figure 3 focuses on the sub-category “Appropriate methodologies” and provides a more detailed description of its properties and dimensions.

### *Knowledge content*

In order to avoid knowledge alienation and increase the knowledge receiver’s commitment to learn, Western knowledge has to be adapted or transformed in order to better match the Eastern European business and cultural environment. It should be understood by Westerners that due to the past of the Soviet Union with its political influences, terms and concepts like management, marketing or even profits were very different or did not even exist.

In recent years in Russia, some relevant knowledge related actions have already been initiated. R1 stated that in 1980 management literature was seldom written in Russia, and nowadays, specific examples to fit this Russian reality can be seen on bookshelves of Russian libraries where journals and magazines contain more real-life examples. This lack of Russian literature was explained by R34 who compared it with Western literature:

[...] our books are mostly theoretical and descriptive in character. This is the result of a lack of practical experience.

He mentioned the marketing book of William Rudelius as having experienced such transformation because:

The book was published in Russian and adapted to Russian business and business-education.

Addressing marketing or management books, R1 criticised that they are just translated, therefore, much more time is required to produce own Russian literature. As a confirmation of these changes in literature, a very recent example was presented at the Conference in St Petersburg (2008) provided by the Technical University of Ilmenau in Eastern Germany and the Russian State University in St Petersburg, which together developed a marketing book and course content. Probably, contributing to this successful work was the cultural affinity existent between the two partners. This interesting and fruitful co-operation is what the Russians, among others, need as R10 suggested:

If Westerners transmit knowledge in Russia it has to be interesting and new for the person.

#### *Tools*

Some practical ideas and tips were provided by different respondents in order to improve the way to transmit knowledge. For example, R2 and R3 suggested making the knowledge manageable by giving examples and showing why it can work. Furthermore, Russian and Eastern Europe were, and are, used to receive clear instructions to perform in whatever job they do; therefore, it is highly recommended in learning to apply a gradual step-by-step approach, implying crystal clear instructions.

Moreover, Russians are already using a practical tool to avoid knowledge alienation integrating their national culture. R1 explained that some universities are involving Russian practitioners or Russians expatriates in their lectures.

In addition, attention was drawn to the pedagogical tool of using games as a way of learning. R3 did not recommend them stressing that the students do not regard games as a serious tool for learning because they do not provide a deep experience and are lacking the reflection of the enterprise's experience. An additional tool, using humour during lectures did not seem to be very persuasive either, as stressed by R2:

[...] as a student I enjoy American comics about sales, this will never work here, in Russia, this, is like selling techniques for idiots. They prefer things that are more in-depth serious.

On the other hand, interaction in KT seems to be accepted by learners. R5 highlighted the importance of having lively lectures where dialogue rather than monologues exists, and sharing lecturer's private experiences with the students is very welcome. Furthermore, he indicated that students and course participants enjoy very much receiving different perspectives from lecturers coming from other countries.

#### *Common mental space*

The need to develop a common mental space or common cognitive ground (Nonaka, 1991) is of vital importance. R1 confirmed that, because of the existence of cultural differences influencing understanding, values, absorptive capacity and also organisational issues like planning or scheduling represent a problem that is not easily overcome.

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R1 and R10 suggested that in order to develop this common mental space more reciprocal actions like listening to one another's opinion and commonly developing and implementing ideas together would definitely contribute. Furthermore, R1 and R4 suggested looking for communalities as a practical way to develop a common mental space, and underlined that this works very well. Additional suggestions were provided by R11 related to establishing working rules, control over the results, and actively organising meetings to improve communication rather than waiting until the end when the problems occur. Furthermore, R6 proposed that having a great interest in the final results would increase the motivation to achieve this common mental space.

Figure 4 focuses on the sub-category "Knowledge receiver characteristics" and provides a more detailed description of its properties and dimensions.

Eastern Europe's and Russia's national characteristics embrace many more than the ones presented here. Nevertheless, the following characteristics were depicted due to the deep influence they have on the process of KT.

#### *Resistance to criticism*

Receiving or providing criticism has a very negative connotation in Russian and Eastern European cultures. It is related to punishment and devaluation of one's self-esteem facing strong resistance to accept it. R9 stressed that Russians will not accept their lack of knowledge because they think they look stupid. This behaviour has negative implications also when mistakes occur, because they try to avoid any personal responsibility and will not admit their own mistakes. Accordingly, R1 acknowledges that "criticism is the weakness of the Russians".

Because of their political past, where authoritarian commands were automatically obeyed, the Eastern European population grew and lived in an environment of blind obedience where space for contradiction or criticism was unimaginable. That impact on attitudes towards criticism is also perceived in the learning environment. R3 stated that Russians are not used to being criticised, rather they follow the instructions, and it is difficult for them to understand that they can contradict somebody. This uncritical behaviour affects the absorptive capacity of the knowledge receiver by being only a mere listener without any self-critical reflection; therefore, a real internalisation of knowledge cannot take place with the learning process remaining on a very superficial level.

#### *Responsibility avoidance*

Another important cultural characteristic inherited from the past Soviet time and still prevailing nowadays is the avoidance of responsibilities. Related to a management gap with respect to a lack of initiative, R9 stressed that is the boss who has the responsibility not the employees. At a later moment of the interview, she explicitly referred to the lack of an entrepreneurial attitude or a "desire for independence" because they do not want to have responsibilities. R2 categorically stated:

Russians are famous to shift responsibilities, they are afraid of making decisions.

Even today, this attitude persists reflected by the following view of R4 who complained because he has too many responsibilities. It often crosses his mind "to go as a barkeeper to one of these British pubs where you get good tips and work two days and rest two days. I would like to go to look for mushrooms to have more private live".

This deep impact of the political climax on people's behaviour is reiterated and criticised by R2, who blamed socialism not only for the damages done in terms of infrastructure or environment, but also, even worse, for psychological damages in terms of submissive behaviour, lack of personal values or being mistreated. He encouraged support as a way to enable people to take more personal responsibilities by reducing the importance of making mistakes if there is a logical explanation behind the failure.

#### *Hierarchical mind*

Expanding on national characteristics, having a hierarchical mind is still part of the Russian and Eastern European mentality of the twenty-first century. Pointing to a leadership gap in terms of motivating behaviour in stimulating critical thinking R8 and R9 explained that management lacks patience in teaching and, by using authoritarian behaviour, discourages employees from having any kind of initiative or asking questions leading to automatic task compliance. Russian managers perceive that, in this way, it is easier to guide the employees. These hierarchical minds are found at all levels in an organisation. As soon as somebody has the chance to hold a slightly higher position over the rest, an authoritarian, even depreciative, behaviour, also with negative marketing implications, can be clearly perceived as illustrated by the following statement:

[...] a sales assistant will not even look at you or say hello, because you are a client as another thousand more (R8).

He further explained that the need to have these hierarchies and control is also expected and needed by many employees as a way to get guidelines in the work place and to fulfil the job according to the boss' demands. R2 explained that Russians working for Western companies feel somehow lost about their performance without this daily control from the management.

#### *Pride*

Related to the Russian pride, R2 stressed: "Russians are very nationalistic". If the Russian pride is hurt, "they get immediately insulted" and they will react saying "we are a country who a man put his feet on the space". Here, the cultural dimension of "a sense of self" comes to mind.

In terms of general knowledge, Russians regard themselves as a knowledgeable country. The influence of the past can also be perceived here. R32 underlined that:

[...] the city has large traditions in research and educational spheres inherited from the Soviet past".

Related to this richness of knowledge, he further clarified that:

In Soviet times the city of Leningrad was very often regarded as an educational and scientific "capital" of the country.

Owing to this rich knowledge background Russians have high expectations in terms of their partner's knowledge. When an imbalance occurs, and Westerners do not fulfil Russian expectations: "a little bit of an ironical and cynical" behaviour might be expected from the Russian part saying "here we are with our American expert" (R2).

On the other hand, as soon as they have the opportunity to show to Western Europe that they are also doing well they will share their achievement, as R1 mentioned:

One product of Procter and Gamble was created in Russia and they sold it in Western countries.

This attitude is used as confirmation of achievement, increases self-esteem and recognition so urgently needed by Russians and Eastern Europeans.

#### *Others*

Related to communication in terms of e-mails or fulfilling deadlines R6 and R1 stated and justified that they are more relaxed than their Western partners. They explained that this happens because they do several things at the same time. In this respect, a high official of the WTO commented:

Russian negotiation deadlines were missing all the time. We don't worry so much about that; important is that, at the end, we meet the objectives.

Additionally, R6 stressed that Russians are practice oriented, as it was mentioned previously related to the knowledge applied to Russian practicality. He explained that:

[...] when Russians buy an appliance they are interested to make the appliance work but without reading the manual instructions.

Furthermore, R2 describes the Russians as strong, inflexible, and sometimes unstructured relating to time and time management.

In terms of commitment, the involvement of the Eastern European partners will depend on how well they feel in the company they are working for. The degree of loyalty is related to the salary they get and the higher the salary is, the higher the loyalty will be (R9). A well-known Russian feature is their hospitality, as R1, R11 and R9) stressed. These respondents indicated that the same hospitality is expected when they come to Western Europe. On the other hand, by this hospitality, relations can further develop and a deeper understanding of the partner's culture can grow, the "ice can be broken" and even stereotypes overcome, as happened to R6 during an interview with the South Korean ambassador on his first visit to the Soviet Union. The ambassador said:

[...] that we have empty stores and are very frosty people, not smiling at all and said that we were made out of stone, and that it was impossible to make contact with us, but after some private invitations and drinking together some vodka he addressed the open mindedness and friendliness of the people.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

The aim of this research was to provide the reader with an awareness and understanding of the obstacles faced in intercultural KT and knowledge reception based on the emerging reality of the Eastern and Russian respondents.

This research clearly shows that the outcome of companies' internationalisation is not only to be judged in economic terms, but also in terms of a successful educational process. This educational process entails a wide range of improvements, starting with a shift in the choice of knowledge transfer methodologies, attitudes and learning environments.

It was found that the Eastern Europeans and Russians unanimously complained that the knowledge that was transmitted to them would not fit with their reality, related to differences in political and economical environment, society, values and understanding. Therefore, they regarded the knowledge as either not being interesting for them or not applicable at all to their current situation. This, coupled with the knowledge transmitter attitudes often being regarded as arrogant in terms of showing superiority, lacking interest in their culture and even humiliating Eastern knowledge, receivers irreversibly lead to strongly flawed learning outcomes. Especially, the lack of cultural awareness hurt the respondents. This relates, for example, to a lack of knowledge on Russian history and Russian reality. They suggested to the Western Europeans to do their homework as a preparation before travelling to Russia. This lack of preparation does not only relate to macroeconomic figures, but also comprises the appreciation of their partner's achievements and partner's knowledge background. This lack of cultural interest and, obviously, lack of preparation, was perceived as depreciation and originated a climate of mistrust.

Therefore, the research findings call for an integrative and co-operative way of learning where mutual opinions are asked for and respected. In order to overcome or to diminish these learning obstacles intensive intercultural awareness training has to come to the fore as a priority for members of both companies involved in the process of transmitting and receiving knowledge. It must not be forgotten that in international co-operations the knowledge flows simultaneously occur in both directions. In addition, all the actors should be involved, from managers to shop floor employees, to avoid a fragmented co-operation but leading to an integrative and successful co-operation.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable recommendations refers to knowledge transfer and learning as neither being a passive nor an imposed process, but a dynamic interactive action. The focus should be on active learning rather than absorption and mere repetition of knowledge.

Summarising, it is important to understand how and why individuals learn in a specific context. This comprises to identify the idiosyncratic learning styles, e.g. learning by using concrete data, statistics or facts, or by being more active learners which need to participate more in order to store the knowledge, having a more active memory as well as knowing the salience of the actors' values and experience. Based on this knowledge, appropriate methodologies techniques or tools to grasp the knowledge and to apply it can be developed.

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### Further reading

- Holden, N.J. and Tansley, C. (2007b), "Culturally distinctive manifestations in international knowledge management: a historical perspective", *International Journal Advanced Media and Communication*, Vol. 1 No. 4, pp. 313-27.

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