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Trust, cultural differences, ICT and safety management

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to argue that systematic preparation for proficient cross-cultural communication has to be an important part of safety (HSE) management in multicultural teams.

Globalization processes have increased the amount of worldwide cross-cultural cooperation resulting in a boost in the number of multi-cultural teams. This trend is even more amplified by the introduction of new information and communication technology (ICT) facilitating cooperation over long distances. This leads to new kind of challenges for safety management in multicultural teams.

Human behaviour and safety are closely linked. Within traditional safety management it is common to use analytical and formalistic methods to systematically identify possible dangerous situations, and then establish barriers, procedures and safeguards to detect and avoid the occurrence of these situations. Still undesired events leading to economic loss and accidents sometimes occur. A majority of these errors are human errors: caused by performances that are not in line with the planned procedures. These kinds of errors often occur due to misunderstandings between employees. Human errors can equally occur as a result of less motivated employees working together; a lack of trust and caring. It will be argued that the possibility of occurrence for both mentioned reasons for human errors increases when a team changes from a single cultural team to become multicultural and that it is possible to do actions preventing these kinds of challenges.

The paper will consist of three parts, where the reader may choose to read only parts 1 and 3.

Part 1 explains why a systematic preparation for efficient cross-cultural communication is an important part of safety management in multicultural teams. The explanation is based on a study conducted at a refinery in Venezuela.

Part 2 gives a more detailed description of the study for readers that are especially interested. This section will rely more on theoretical references. The readers that would like to avoid too much theoretization may go directly from part 1 to part 3 without losing the main arguments of the paper.

Part 3 suggests some approaches to systematic preparation for efficient cross-cultural communication in multicultural teams;

- A. Adjustment of safety behaviour programs to fit local conditions and contexts.
- B. Courses preparing for cross-cultural communication challenges and how to handle them.
- C. Facilitating for international HSE experience transfers.

Part 1: Cross-cultural communication and its impact on safety management

Cross-cultural communication has at least two impacts on safety management:

1. Poor cross-cultural communication may lead to direct misunderstandings in the communication between two employees causing undesirable situations that may develop into more serious accidents.
2. Poor cross-cultural communication may affect the working environment and the establishment of trust and goodwill among the employees. Thus, it may easily affect the employees' motivations to care for their colleagues.

The first point stated above is likely to seem obvious for a majority of the readers. It is obviously connected to language skills, but equally important is cultural differences because of the process of perception that may cause people to interpret the same situation/event differently.

The latter point could be more difficult to grasp and is indirectly associated with safety management. Point 2 above is therefore exemplified with some quotations from the study, "*The Game of Trust*" [1] which is based on interviews from a refinery in Venezuela. During the winter of 2002/2003 45 in-depth interviews were carried out with European and Venezuelan engineers and technicians who had worked together in a refinery for two years. To understand the social situation in the society in more general terms, the social context of everyday life outside the boundaries of the refinery, a previous fieldwork was carried out by a participant observation method over a period of six months in close proximity with 24 students. The analysis was based on a

comparison of these two fieldworks.

One example illustrating point 2 above: The European panel operator in the main control room is communicating with a local operator in the plant using normal radio equipment.

Norwegian Technician (NT): *We have a few fan-sections. Once, when I looked at the meter to control the temperatures I discovered that a couple of the fans might have gotten blocked. I asked one of the men out there to check it out. He reported back that they were as warm as they should be. I told him that that was strange because the meter showed that the fans were cold. "Are you sure you checked the right ones?" Then he became almost angry with me on the radio: "Yes, they are nice and warm. Don't you believe me?" So, I stopped discussing with him and talked to another foreigner [from Europe] that I was confident knew what to look for. He went out to check and when he came back he reported that the fans were cold. Then we called him [the local operator] one more time and said: "Listen, how could you tell that these are warm?" Then he just stood there pretending not to understand anything.*

Interviewer: *Did this situation repeat itself?*

NT: *No, this was a single incident. But often you experience small incidents like this. They destroy the results. Once, during a cooling process one of the men did not manage to close the vent completely and did not tell us. Therefore it was remained open. And if you are not able to do something you have to let someone know so that you can get some help to do it properly. He did not ask for help and because of this incident a tank broke.* ([1], page 138)

Safety management was not the focus of the study, but the main findings in the study are, as the quotation has illustrated, highly relevant for safety management as well.

The situation mentioned in the above quotation was not necessarily a result of misunderstandings due to language skills in the communication between the two operators. It could also have occurred as a result of the relationship between the two operators. The Western operator lacked an important skill. Why was he not able to communicate effectively with his colleague from Venezuela?

Findings in "The Game of Trust" gives explanations why it will be of relatively higher importance to cultivate relationships and to use time and energy to establish a base of trust in social relationships in societies where institutional systems are, relatively speaking, less successful than in other societies. It also shows that this social phenomenon is relevant in work relationships. One part of this "game of trust" is the local expectations of what is proper behaviour in different situations.

Cultural factors in safety management

In order to avoid undesirable situations, exemplified by the situation described in the quotation, a systematic preparation

for proficient cross-cultural communication, i.e. increase the awareness for cultural aspects and expectations of proper behavior in that cultural area, must be added as a part of proactive safety management in multicultural teams. Thus, *in addition* to the traditional focus on developing procedures and safety barriers, attention should as well be given to cultural differences that may affect the quality of the relationships between the members of the multicultural team.

The main argument in "The Game of Trust"

The society outside the refinery is characterized by weaker state institutions facing problems with corruption and criminality at all levels of society. It has developed a system of exchanging friendly favours, locally called "palanca" and "amiguismo", that is widely used to get things done in regard to bureaucracy, police and other institutions. This phenomenon creates a "less absolute" and less practically oriented society, as one Norwegian engineer and a Venezuelan technician described:

Norwegian engineer: *Acquaintances and friendly favours characterize the entire society. You should be careful about not addressing this directly as long as it is nothing personal. People would not say anything negatively about others directly, but everyone knows that this is how it works. Everyone will have examples that it is the way it works. It is a less absolute society.*

([1], page 58)

Venezuelan technician (VT): *Here in Venezuela finding the solution may be difficult. So that is why it takes a long time to solve the problem. There are many factors you need to take into consideration.*

Interviewer: *More complex? Does it involve more human factors?*

VT: *Yes, they [the US] are more practically oriented.*

([1], page 108)

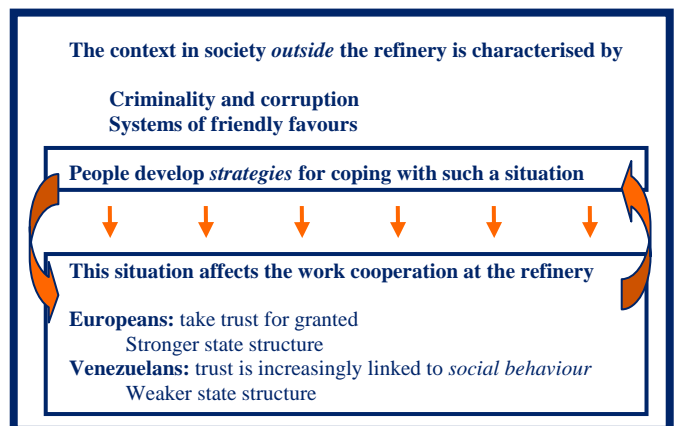


Figure 1: The main argument in "The Game of Trust"

Venezuela, with a weaker state structure compared to the states in Europe and as a society characterized by a high degree of insecurity, do not provide a safety net to the citizens.

This affects the collectively perceived risk pattern. People develop strategies to cope with such a problematic situation. One of these strategies are linked to expectations of what is perceived as proper behaviour and conditions for developing trust in social relationships. This situation is so dominant in social life outside the refinery that it also affects the cross-cultural cooperation inside the refinery.

The following quotation sums up the main mechanisms and aspect of the argument in “*The Game of Trust*”. It is a Venezuelan technician (VT) explaining:

Interviewer: *What is important in a relation?*

VT: *The most important in a relation is communication and to know the other person. The better we know each other the more trust we have, and from there many good moments can emerge because we have a good foundation.*

Interviewer: *Construct a foundation?*

VT: *Yes, a foundation consisting of good communication*

Interviewer: *Is there anything that is unacceptable in a relation?*

VT: *Yes, lies. If I am talking to someone and you come up to me and tell me the status of the work you are doing, and I suddenly see that it is not correct and then another thing that is not correct, and you were standing in the crowd over there. That would be as far as we would go. That would be enough!*

Interviewer: *Because this is connected with trust?*

VT: *Exactly*

Interviewer: *How do you gain trust? I am surprised by how important trust is here in Venezuela.*

VT: *We are used to people being on the defensive. **We all have had bad experiences with people that lie, you see?** That is why you always start out a bit on the defensive. On the first meeting we would never say anything to people we don't know.*

Interviewer: *In other words, you are being careful?*

VT: *Yes, exactly!*

Interviewer: *And you always need to show that you are willing to allow trust?*

VT: *Yes, exactly!*

Interviewer: *How can you lose trust? In the same way?*

VT: *Exactly!* ([1], page 28)

The technician describes the main mechanism in “*The Game of Trust*”: In the beginning you are skeptical to people you don't know because during life you have experienced so many situations that give you a reason not to trust; experiences from living in a “less absolute society”. Therefore, trust in another person, including a colleague, is something that has to be earned and maintained based on actions and fulfillments of expectations on how to act. The study concludes that social codes exist for building trust that are closely linked to the expectations of proper behavior.

“The Game of Trust” at the refinery; a process of perception

The interviews focused on the employees' experiences from more than two years of cross-cultural cooperation in a technological environment. The following summary gives a stereotypic description of the cooperation between Europeans and Venezuelans as it was described from these parties respectively. When confronted with these descriptions neither the Europeans nor the Venezuelans expressed familiarity with how they were described by their colleagues. This situation was the starting point of an analysis of how the cross-cultural meeting was experienced by the parties involved. An important part of the analysis had references to the process of *perception*, and how the social contextual situation both in Europe and Venezuela (outside the refinery environment) affected their perceptions of the behaviour of others.

Stereotypic description of the behaviour of their Venezuelan colleagues as perceived by the Europeans

Even though most of the European employees emphasized that it is pleasant and social to work with their Venezuelan colleagues, they claimed that they were not always content. Some complained about what they perceived to be chaos caused by a lot of unnecessary chat and often an inappropriate amount of joking. The Latin American tradition of hierarchy was also very unusual for them. A majority of the European employees experienced that decision-making was a long process and that it appeared them as if many of the decisions made seemed to be made at random. Further, some claimed that they experienced the Venezuelans to take less pride in their job and did not focus enough on the work. A majority of the Europeans felt that they had to give people a kick-start and that it was necessary to verify that people were actually doing the work they were supposed to do. One of the experiences most Europeans had encountered was that the word “no” hardly existed in the vocabulary of their Venezuelan colleagues. In different situations they had experienced that they could not fully trust their local colleagues to do what they were asked to do or had agreed to do. Having to verify that the work was actually carried out was not something the Europeans were accustomed to. This aspect is exemplified by the following quotations from some European engineers explaining what surprised them:

Norwegian engineer: *I have to check in the corridors to see if the messages have gotten through. In the beginning I was surprised by the fact that everybody said “yes” when meaning “no”. It took me some time to realize this. You need to check twice to see if the message has gotten through and if they actually mean it when they say “yes”. Discovering this was a bit frustrating. Now we deal with these things by talking to people in private. We want to know the truth directly, whether it is good or bad because when you are going to make a decision you need a solid platform. Not just at work. The word well known in Norwegian as “no” does not exist here.*

([1], page 29)

French engineer: *You always have to check the communication. A Venezuelan never says “no”. If they don’t understand they still say “yes”. When I make decisions here in Venezuela I always get it in writing. Not like in Europe. It is relative. A word from a Venezuelan is of lesser value than a word from a European: a word is not a word.*

([1], page 138)

French engineer: *Punctuality is one aspect. Another problem is that they always say “yes”. They say “yes” to more and more and in the end they are not able to complete all the things they have agreed to do. There are a lot of different processes. They jump on to another project while another project is not completed and still running.*

(...)

When I explain something they always say: “Yes, yes, no problem”. Later I discover that they did not understand. But they did not stop us while we were doing it. This is the most important issue. They are very proud and are not willing to say that they have problems understanding. I have to get personally involved. I have to control everything: 1) find out if people really know what they claim to know, and 2) if projects are concluded

(...)

The French are also Latinos, but we don’t have this problem.

([1], page 138)

For the French engineer this was a serious challenge because he carried a position of responsibility in a HSE department. A large part of his work consisted of explaining and giving lectures in the HSE procedures and other safety related issues for the local employees. He did not feel confident that they really got the message when they said that they had.

Stereotypic description of the behaviour of their European colleagues as perceived by the Venezuelans

The Venezuelans, on the other hand, emphasized that the Europeans were following regulations rigidly and were perceived to take on unnecessarily aggressive behaviors. Episodes where people had been yelling and banging fists on the table were mentioned by many of the interviewees. The Venezuelans thought that the Europeans criticized too directly and often in public for other people to hear. This is, according to the Venezuelans interviewed, inappropriate behavior. Further, the Europeans were described as cold, mechanic, and only engaged in their work. The quotations from Venezuelan employees may illustrate these aspects:

Interviewer: *Can you describe a situation at work when you felt offended?*

Venezuelan engineer: *We are in a group discussing something and you yell at me in front of everyone. This I do not accept! No, this is lack of respect! Call me into your office, just the two of us. That is OK. But not in front of all the others: No! And people should*

use my name and not “little negro, little white man” in front of the others. No! If we have trust it is good, and so is respect. This has happened. All the incidents.... You could....(laughing) And in front of the others. NO!

([1], page 116)

Venezuelan technician: *Well, there was one person in the panel that spoke with us a lot and there was a “watchdog” that did not speak much to us [both were Europeans]. He just wanted to work and did not even greet us in the morning as opposed to the other one who came over and said “Hi, how are you doing?” etc. This way he will gain more trust. Because if you start to work immediately, you will feel like....air. The Norwegians and the French are more like that. They start to work directly without any attempt to establish contact. This is my impression and my experience. The one on the panel [the one that talked much] did not speak Spanish very well, but he understood almost everything. We worked together and he trusted us.*

(...)

He did not have any reasons not to trust us. That’s why the boys do a great job. “You are my eyes”, he used to say all the time, “what you see out there is what I see.” We had a good time together with him.

([1], page 151)

Venezuelan technician (VT): *Europeans focus more on their work than on issues concerning human relations.*

Interviewer: *Do you have any specific examples?*

VT: *Yes, I have seen some. In some situations I have observed a colleague’s reactions to an order. They were discussing and the European gave an order. It was nothing that had to be done immediately. And my colleague did something else. The one giving the order lost his temper: “When I give an order you will do it!” He often reacted like this. In some of the cases I tried to interfere. Not because I wanted to defend the other one, but to show this person that he needs to give space and time and a possibility for the other activity to be done in tranquility and not under this kind of pressure!*

Interviewer: *How did you and your colleagues respond to such a harsh reaction?*

VT: *First the reaction was the same; the other person became angry too. “Wait. I will not let you shout and yell at me. I don’t like that you speak to me like that! Lower your voice. Why do you react like this?” The other one started out in an explosive and harsh way. He said: “Not like that!” and then he went to his [Venezuelan] boss. “I have this and this problem, etc.” The situation calmed down and it became better. It was over. I understand that this was a way of behaving.*

Interviewer: *What do you think made him so angry?*

VT: *First of all the language was a barrier. It is*

fundamental. He was speaking Spanish but not as well as the others. After the language it is the way of behaving; habits, personality, culture. The shock came because the other one expected a direct, immediate answer and when he didn't get it, it was inappropriate in a European context.

Interviewer: *Are there any situations where you have felt offended?*

VT: *Yes. If we take the situation just discussed a Latin man would feel offended or not respected because of the responses he or she gets, the expression of the response. The way we understand this is that orders can be given without pressure, strong voice, violence, and anger.*

([1], page 117)

The Venezuelans wanted to be able to joke in order to blow off steam. Furthermore, they pointed out that they should also be given enough room and the opportunity to handle unpredicted events without rigidly following the rules. The Europeans did not share their private life with their colleagues, something that was pointed out by the Venezuelans. They did not talk about their families or socialize in any other ways. The Europeans were perceived as only being interested in getting the work done.

Consequences of cross-cultural communication challenges

These quotations illustrate how local strategies for handling the unstable and unsafe situation in the society outside the refinery filters into the refinery context. As stressed earlier, neither the Europeans nor the Venezuelans expressed familiarity with how they were described by their colleagues. A main argument has been that different perceptions of the same situations occur due to interpretations based on experiences the persons have accumulated through many years and that this process of perception has consequences for cooperation and safety management if not handled properly. Some examples of such consequences from the study:

Norwegian technician: *A big discussion emerged. I banged my hand on the table and told them that: "We can not keep on working this way!"*

(...)

After my outburst it became quiet..

([1], page 115)

Norwegian engineer: *In the beginning I tried to confront my Venezuelan colleagues, but the consequence was that the curtains came down. No communication. They withdrew...not only in the moment, but also afterwards.*

([1], page 114)

Interviewer: *Do you have any advice for those who are going to take over your position?*

French engineer: *You must be careful about how you act. You can not afford to be proud. You have to become encapsulated in order to gain trust. To avoid getting angry. The best way to behave is in a normal*

way. If you don't, they will not be willing to talk. In addition they will build up mistrust against you.

([1], page 115)

Norwegian engineer: *You are dependent on goodwill before they are willing to do or say anything. You need to step carefully or else you will hit a wall.*

(...)

They do not like to be confronted with it when they do something wrong. You need to contact them indirectly.....

([1], page 115)

Venezuelan engineer (VI): *When you discuss something with a European and he says that you are no good, that is harsh, isn't it? People have never said that to me. You don't say that here. You show them and give a hint: "You need to improve." Not as hard as the Europeans do it!*

Interviewer: *Has it ever happened?*

VI: *Yes!*

Interviewer: *How do the Venezuelans react?*

VI: *Well, we do what has to be done, but afterwards we want as little contact with them as possible.*

Interviewer: *And then the Europeans come and create order. How do they react to that?*

VI: *They become quiet. People get closed: "Oops, here comes the angry man!"*

([1], page 115)

Venezuelan engineer: *When will I feel offended? When people shout at me.*

(...)

Venezuelans are not used to shouting. They feel bad and get angry.

([1], page 117)

The Venezuelans felt offended by the situation and reacted by withdrawing from it; "the curtains came down". They only did what they needed to do. The motivation and goodwill to cooperate becomes low.

This may have been the situation in the first quotation mentioned in this paper, describing an undesirable event between a panel operator and an operator in the plant. Thus, following the arguments in this paper, the undesirable situation could have been avoided if it had given enough attention to cultural factors that may have affected the quality of the relationships between members of the multicultural team in addition to developing procedures and safety barriers.

The next chapter, Part 2, will give a more detailed description of the study for readers that are especially interested. The chapter will base the arguments on more theoretical references. Other readers may go directly to Part 3.

Part 2: Trust, behaviour and expectations of behaviour

The initial goal of the study was to understand why Europeans

and Venezuelans have different attitudes towards punctuality and planning. This issue was explained by focusing on how *formal* processes in an organization need support from more *informal* trust-generating activities to operate as intended. The study describes informal activities aiming at creating and maintaining trust in social relations in a situation where such trust cannot be taken for granted due to conditions in that particular society. As the quotations mentioned in this paper have illustrated, poor trust creation in working relationships may lead to dangerous and undesirable situations because it affects how employees interact.

In the study, trust was viewed as a phenomenon closely connected to perception of risk by individuals and groups of individuals as described by Giddens [2] and Luhmann [3]. The Venezuelans perceived the risk in a specific social situation differently than the Europeans due to differences in their personal experiences, used as the source for interpretation.

The last quotation in Part 1 (page 2) does not only illustrate what is meant by collective perceived risk patterns (outlined text), it also illustrates the four main aspects involved in generating trust as illustrated in "*The Game of Trust*:"

Nr. 1: You will enter a social relationship with distrust until it is proven that she/he is worthy of your trust. As one student said: "*It is difficult to trust*"

Nr. 2: Information about the other person in the relationship is an important part of communication. This sentence illustrates the reason: "*The more I know about you, the more you are bound to me and you are more obligated not to betray me.*"

Nr. 3: You do not have reasons for trusting someone's word. You have experienced too many broken promises; therefore you always have to show *loyalty in actions*: You continuously have to *show interest* in keeping the relationship alive.

Nr. 4: This situation creates a moral universe divided into "in/out-groups". You are loyal to the ones you define as your in-group; a world divided in "friends and enemies".

This is different than in European countries and it has developed as a result of unstable formal institutions in society. In the following chapter this argument is explained using Giddens' [2] concept of abstract expert systems.

Some theoretical reflections about a "less absolute society"

Giddens [2] assumes that trust embedded in abstract expert systems makes it easier for people in general to trust each other. Abstract expert systems are everything from science, technical knowledge, laws, medicine, etc., that you as a modern person deal with on a daily basis, but without knowing fully how they function. You choose to travel on an airplane even though you do not know how the airplane is built or how to fly it. You trust that the experts of this special expert

system, airplane technicians and pilots, know what they are doing. The same occurs if you have to get help from a physician or a lawyer. These individuals become the gatekeepers of abstract expert systems. It is the abstract system itself, and not its gatekeepers representing the abstract expert system, which becomes the object of trust.

However, in "*The Game of Trust*" it is argued that Giddens takes for granted that such abstract systems always work as intended. Giddens argues that people's experiences with gatekeepers of the abstract systems, i.e. lawyers, police officers or doctors, are important mechanisms embedding trust in abstract systems. On the other hand, an underlying theme in the material from the local students, collected during fieldwork carried out before the interviews at the refinery, indicates a high degree of uncertainty in their society; a high crime rate, rapid changes in politics and economics. Many of the locals had little reason to trust bureaucracy, institutions or legislation; i.e. the legislative expert systems. It was not the system itself that was not trustworthy, but the practical implementation of the system; the locals had low confidence in the gatekeepers managing the abstract expert systems; that the gatekeepers were following the rules of the system as intended. This society is characterized with weaker state structures. Hence, different state institutions, and acts of its representatives, i.e. politicians, the police and bureaucracy, will not give the local citizens a feeling of having a safety net, which is the case for people living in societies with a higher grade of stability.

Latin America is characterized by a violent history, and the region has suffered from unstable political situations and several coup d'états. The latest happened in April 2002 in Venezuela during the previous fieldwork among the students. To experience the coup d'état while living together with the students provided the researcher with useful insights into how a society's institutions affects the citizens' feelings of stability and security. The past and present history of the region has also been characterized by corruption at all levels of the society and a growing division between the huge group of extremely poor and the ruling, rich elite as described by Coronil [4]. This uncertainty, as the study among the local students showed, was caused by little faith in the possibility of getting a stable life in the future, as well as a high crime rate and little trust in the local police or other institutions in the society. Many students were robbed during the first research period, but no one went to the police. "*It is no point of going to the police, they don't do anything anyway*". When the police (a formal institution) fail to guarantee your security, how do you manage to find such a guarantee? What ends up being the object, and thus the people's foundation, of trust and a feeling of security? One possible answer is a person's (informal) alliances and family. Some students also mentioned money as a guarantee; If you have money you can always buy your way out of trouble in a corrupt society. Alliances and informal networks become highly important for establishing predictability in an insecure and "less absolute society;" one main strategy to deal with the problematic situation they face.

In contrast to what Giddens proposes, even though Venezuela is modern in many ways, a sense of security is to a great extent created by the capacity to develop personal relationships with people that may help you in a problematic situation. Abstract systems, such as the society's institutions, are not an object of trust in the same way as relationships. Relations and rules are also interconnected in Norway, but in Venezuela personal relations function as a guarantee of predictability, and are thus more important. Since there is little protection to be found in the legislation, one needs goodwill and/or a sense of mutual 'use' for motivation to cooperate.

Informal activities, such as greetings, jokes and investment of time in social relationships by giving information about family and personal life, then, is a process that in a Venezuelan context is continuous and important in order to achieve a sense of responsibility. Since trust is not taken for granted, it has to be actively created and maintained, for example through the local mechanisms involved in trust building. While chat, jokes, and a "lack of structure" was linked to relaxation and not to a work situation for the Europeans, a continuous stream of jokes and dynamic interaction throughout day were not only important aspects in informal trust building processes for the Venezuelans, but also a source of relaxation as a way of dealing with stress due to the unsafe life.

Venezuelan technician: *We Venezuelans try to create a more enjoyable working environment. If we have to think about work, work, work..... we always need some space to break away from the stress and pressure. That is why we joke. We break up the routine. Sometimes we say things on the radio that can be understood in a different way, you know, words with double meaning. That is one way of having fun. We always try to make fun in this way. Sometimes there is a lot of work to do, and a lot of pressure and stress, and in some way or another you have to come up with a solution. This approach is characteristic for Venezuelans to solve problems in every situation. You will always try to find a way out and there will always be an opportunity to make a joke. The situation can be really bad, but people are still having fun and keep the good mood when encountering problems. As we say here in Venezuela: "In bad times, good humor."*

([1], page 118)

As we have seen in Part 1, a behaviour from the Europeans perceives as somewhat aggressive among the Venezuelans, often as a response to jokes, lack of punctuality and a 'lack of structure', could generate badwill and create uncertainty among the locals. The reasons for this are experiences of being a part of a society where relationships are perceived as very important for individual security. Dealing with relationships affects every part of daily life; even when you are at work:

Venezuelan technician: *Everybody works, but there is a time for working and some time is dedicated to communication. In the beginning you can not start to work immediately. You have to get to know the other*

person and then you can start to work. Because if you start to work without knowing each other it is easy for misunderstandings to emerge. First you become acquainted, being integrated as a group and then you will be able to work together.

([1], page 142)

It has been argued that the social mechanisms discussed in the study of reference are relevant for safety management in multi-cultural teams. Cultural issues, if mishandled, may become very expensive as well, as they, besides affecting safety as argued in this paper, will also influence operational regularity and efficiency.

Part 3: Some approaches to a systematic preparation for efficient cross-cultural communication

We have seen that neither the Europeans nor the Venezuelans expressed any familiarity with how they were described by their colleges due to perception processes. Such perception processes involve interpretation of information based on earlier experiences and conceptions of the world you are a member of; your lifeworld. Assumptions of risk patterns are part of these lifeworlds. The best way to overcome cross-cultural challenges is therefore to achieve information of the lifeworlds of other people; what is important to them? It then becomes easier to understand how other people react to your own behaviour, and it also becomes easier for you not to misinterpret the behaviour of your colleagues. In this section three approaches will be outlined as examples of how to facilitate this process.

A: A tailor-made safety behaviour program fitted to local conditions and contexts

Many oil and gas companies have developed safety behaviour training programs focusing not only on traditional proactive safety and HSE management, but in addition involve a more human based approach focusing on how the employees are "living" the procedures and barriers as well; the more human aspects of safety and HSE management.

In the attempt to address these challenges in activities on the Norwegian Continental Shelf (NCS) Statoil has since 2003 successfully rolled out such a safety behaviour training programme. Instead of focusing only on formal procedures and technical and procedural safety barriers, the focus in this behaviour training program has been centred on the awareness of the following five *behavioural* safety barriers:

1. Correct prioritisation
2. Compliance
3. Open dialogue
4. Continual risk assessment
5. Caring about each other

By addressing these safety barriers the goal has been to create an environment characterized by open dialogue and a culture promoting caring for other colleagues.

Arguments raised in this paper support the use of such

behaviour training programmes, and they are believed to be especially important for multicultural teams. Still, cultural differences are not often addressed in these kinds of safety behaviour training programmes.

Using Statoil's safety behaviour programme as an example we can see that especially safety barriers 3 and 5, open dialogue and caring about each other, are affected by the discussion included in this paper. If you are supposed to care for someone you need to build up goodwill for this person; a motivation for caring. Poor cross-cultural communication results in employees feeling offended, misinterpreted and upset, as many of the quotations from the study have illustrated. This does not cultivate goodwill. Safety barrier 3, open dialogue, means the possibility to express concern and intervene in a situation involving other colleagues. There are cultural distinct ways of intervening, when it is appropriate to intervene, and who are supposed to be able to intervene. Because these cultural mindsets are so close linked to traditional power structures and the acceptance and cultivation of hierarchy, these kinds of safety barriers may be perceived as threatening and by this create a feeling of insecurity.

Based on the argumentation presented in this paper a safety behaviour training programme intended for multicultural teams should also involve a section addressing challenges with cross-cultural communication, and it should preferably also be tailor-made to reflect local conditions and cultural praxis. Examples could be the impact of origin, age, status symbols, view of women, different ethnic groups, religious taboos, honour/shame, other frames of religious references, etc.

B: Courses preparing for the handling of cross-cultural communication challenges

Following the argumentation in this paper a course on cultural awareness will itself have a positive impact on safety management even though it is not a part of an established safety behaviour training programme. As stressed through out the paper, the different interpretations of the same cooperation situation emerged due to perception processes based on the participants' earlier experiences in their home culture. It is therefore recommended to give this kind of course as a workshop. This will provide the participants and the facilitator with a foundation of common experienced situations on which to discuss cultural challenges. The multicultural team could be asked to solve a task/problem. Then, during the workshop many of the cross-cultural communication issues related to the composition of this multicultural team are likely to occur. If the facilitator of the workshop is a trained human behaviourist he will be able to recognize these situations. He can stop the work of the group and start a dialog concerning the cross-cultural communication issues that emerged during the workshop. This approach will give the participants experiences that can help them understand how their colleagues interpret their own behaviour, and they are more likely to avoid misinterpreting their colleagues.

C: Facilitating international HSE experience transfers

Internationally oil and gas companies have many employees

with extensive experience about local conditions, cultural praxis and how these local conditions and cultural practices affect the implementation of the company's safety and HSE management philosophy in the areas where the company operates. This vulnerable resource for the company should be systematically collected and nurtured in order to continuously improve the company's safety management philosophy and safety behaviour training programmes. Both the previously mentioned approaches need input from the employees' earlier experiences in order to be tailor-made to fit local culture and conditions. Thus A, B and C do not have to be seen as separate ways of dealing with cultural differences, but as three interconnected and mutually dependent approaches.

ICT may amplify cross-cultural communication challenges

Addressing the impact of cultural differences on cooperation and communication in multicultural teams will be even more important in the future. An increased opportunity within information and communication technology (ICT) is a great advantage for the industry because it opens up for cooperation, support and sharing of knowledge over geographical dispersed areas. Within the oil and gas industry ICT is e.g. used to allow expert centres located in different countries to discuss real time data by communication through video conferences. On the other hand, ICT may also involve new challenges. The new challenges arise because the use of ICT involves different communication mechanisms than those normally used. What is communicated will only be a part of what is communicated face to face. ICT does not easily communicate body language. In this way ICT may not only contribute to increase the amount of cross-cultural cooperation as mentioned in the introduction, but it might amplify the effect of the challenges involved in cross-cultural cooperation affecting regularity and safety (HSE) management as well.

Thus, use of ICT intensifies the need for including cultural awareness and effects of cross-cultural communication as part of the safety behaviour training programmes for the future.

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