# CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

How managers of international teams can help international employees adapt to a new cultural context

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# Title Page

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## Preface

The document you are about to read is my graduation assignment in order to obtain the Master of Science Degree in Business Administration, specialization Human Resource Management.

The subject of this proposal is internationalization in higher education, with a specific focus on cultural intelligence. I have always been interested in traveling to other countries and getting to know other cultures. The last year of my bachelor degree I spent in Surinam, for an internship and graduation project at McDonald's Surinam. The culture clash I experienced as a European girl in an American company in a South American developing country was fascinating and triggered me to learn more about how different cultures work together in an organizational environment.

During the process I faced some difficulties in writing, especially in the beginning, when the focus of this research was not clear yet. As time progressed, I became more familiar with the context and the literature and things started to fall into place. I am very satisfied to have finished this master thesis now and look forward to the new phase that lies ahead.

However, I would not have been able to do this on my own and would like to thank the people that supported me through this process. First of all I want to thank Dr. Anna Bos-Nehles for her support and guidance, not only on a professional but also on a personal level. Furthermore I want to thank Dr. Huub Ruël for his guidance and feedback. Subsequently I would like to thank Annemiek Baars and Joost Sluijs for offering me the possibility to conduct the research at University of Twente and their help and enthusiasm during the process.

I want to thank my best friend Denise Arends for conducting a part of this research together and for always being there to help me. In addition I want to thank my dear aunt Marlies Bower-Kramer for my thesis editing and proofreading, which I really appreciate.

And last but not least, I want to thank all the managers who participated in this research and allocated time in their schedules for an interview with me. Without them, I would not have been able to write this thesis.

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# Abstract

This research aims to understand which techniques managers of international teams in higher education institutes use to increase the cultural intelligence of their employees. Cultural intelligence refers to a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts and consists of four sub dimensions. The first, the cognitive dimension, refers to understanding the idea of culture and the differences across societies. The metacognitive dimension, secondly, refers to using cultural knowledge to create an understanding of a new cultural context and the ability to reflect on one's thinking processes. The motivational dimension refers to the drive someone has to adapt to a new cultural context and the behavioral dimension, lastly, refers to the ability to act appropriately in different cultural contexts.

An explorative single case study performed in a University in the east of the Netherlands explored several techniques that managers use to help international employees to adapt to a new cultural context. In-depth interviews were held with 20 managers of the most internationally diverse teams of the university and document analysis added further data. The research shows that managers apply several techniques to enhance each dimension. First of all they select for cognitive cultural intelligence. Moreover, (meta)cognitive cultural intelligence is increased by assigning international employees a buddy on the first working day and offer them introduction manuals to familiarize them with the local culture. To enhance motivational cultural intelligence social events are organized and facilitated to stimulate interaction. To generate behavioral cultural intelligence, lastly, managers spend a lot of time explaining to employees what type of behavior is expected. This study contributes to science by expanding the literature, since cultural intelligence has so far never been studied in the setting of a higher education institution. The results of this study reveal the techniques that managers use to develop the cultural intelligence in higher education institutions. The practical implications mainly focus on the role of HRM in the implementation of an internationalization policy in higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, Higher Education Institutes, Cultural Intelligence, Human Resource Management

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Relevance

Universities experience strong global competition. Environmental factors such as social, economic, technological and political forces are rapidly changing and globalization is an irreversible process. Due to globalization, an increasing amount of students, estimated to be 1.6 million, cross the borders of their home country for reasons of studying (Altbach, 2015). These changes put pressure on universities worldwide to adapt rapidly and invest in internationalization (Bartell, 2003).

According to Altbach and Knight (2007), universities should invest in internationalization to improve the reputation and thus the competitiveness of the university, to meet the demand of the rising amount of young people for worldwide access to universities and to earn higher profits by charging international students high fees. Stromquist (2007) and Qiang (2003) state that universities have to incorporate an extra international/intercultural dimension in their teaching and research, as well as in their service functions, to prepare their students for the globalized world and teach them intercultural skills. According to Knight (2006), the main reason for internationalization for nonprofit universities is to expand knowledge and research to improve cultural understanding.

There has been an enormous growth in international activities of higher education institutions during the past two decades. These activities may for example relate to greater recruitment of international students or exchange programs and to enable students to broaden their cultural experience. Universities may also undertake activities to provide students access to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demand. Besides activities to internationalize teaching, activities to internationalize research and services by attracting international scientists are undertaken (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This raises the importance of attracting talented scientists from all over the world.

Ellingboe (1998, p. 199) defined internationalization of higher education institutions as follows: "*… is the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system. It is an ongoing, future-oriented, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal*

*dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally focused, ever-changing external environment."*

Internationalization is associated with a large influx of foreign employees and a multicultural work environment has become the norm for most universities. People from all over the world, with different backgrounds, cultures, languages, ethnicities and religions, work together in international teams. Working in a multinational team and adapting to new cultural contexts is a big challenge for international organizations and their employees (Earley & Peterson, 2004). According to Triandis (2006), everybody is ethnocentric, which means that people assume that their own culture is normal and anything different from that is abnormal. This causes challenges for international organizations. When new employees are surrounded by unfamiliar cultures, they face challenges adapting to those cultures since the new standards, habits and behaviors are unfamiliar and confusing (Ang et al., 2007). A common challenge for international employees is understanding the rules for interaction. An example is solving disagreements. Some employees come from confrontational cultures, where others are focused on face saving. When an employee disagrees with another member of the team, the way to discuss that issue might cause difficulties. Furthermore, establishing a shared goal and clarifying the roles within the team might be challenging, since people have different expectations, based on cultural background and experience. (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

Organizations need people who are able to adapt fast and work well in international teams and therefore intercultural understanding is very important. An important aspect in the successful collaboration between people from different cultures is *cultural intelligence* (Triandis, 2006, Earley & Mosakowski, 2004).

Cultural Intelligence is defined by Earley & Ang (2003), p. 26) as follows: *"Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts and thus refers to a form of situated intelligence where intelligently adaptive behaviors are culturally bound to the values and beliefs of a given society or culture".*

Cultural intelligence is related to workforce diversification and predicts the effectiveness of multicultural team processes and the cultural adaptation within the team. Therefore, it became crucial to understand why some individuals adapt more easily to new cultural contexts and others do not (Van Dyne et al, 2012). Ang and Van Dyne (2008) state that the

extent to which a person is culturally intelligent, and thus is able to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts, depends on four dimensions: the metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral dimension. The metacognitive dimension refers to the mental capability to acquire and evaluate cultural knowledge. The cognitive dimension refers to knowledge about cultural differences, openness and self-awareness. The motivational dimension refers to the ability to function and keep performing in intercultural contexts. Perseverance is important because usually things go wrong before they succeed. The behavioral dimension refers to the ability to adapt behaviors to different cultural contexts.

According to Triandis (2006), it is possible to increase someone's cultural intelligence, but it requires extensive training. People need to place themselves in other cultures and think about why people have different norms. This is where Human Resource Management (HRM) starts to play an important role. Cultural understanding is very important for Human Resource (HR) managers to add value and HRM should take responsibility for effective collaboration of different people from different cultures in one team (Friedman, 2007). Therefore, the HR policy needs to focus on various factors. First of all, HRM needs to align the HR activities with the overall business strategy. Furthermore, HRM should support the managers of international teams in the internationalization process. They need support in creating alignment across different cultures and in helping international employees to communicate effectively. Subsequently, HRM will take care of maximizing employee contributions by assessing training needs and providing efficient training programs, in this case training regarding cultural intelligence. Lastly, HRM is responsible for increasing the sensitivity to cultural differences. They need to implement best practices in a way that creates alignment across different cultural and business environments (Friedman, 2007).

## 1.2  Research Objective & Question

As demonstrated in the previous section, internationalization is a hot topic in higher education institutions. The adaptation of team members to a new cultural context is a big challenge for organizations. Therefore, the primary goal of this research is to understand the techniques that managers of international teams in higher education use to help international employees adapt to a new cultural context. Furthermore, this research aims

to look for ways in which HRM can support managers of international teams in that process.

Based on the objective of this research, the main research question is:

*"Which techniques do managers of international teams in higher education institutions use to help international employees to adapt to a new cultural context?"*

## 1.3  Contributions

The information generated by this study contributes to science as well as to practice. The contribution to science is in the form of an expansion to the literature on the topic of enhancing cultural intelligence in an international higher education institution. Cultural intelligence is a relatively new concept, which has not been studied in the setting of a higher education institution before. Therefore, this research contributes to science by identifying techniques that managers use to develop the cultural intelligence of their team members in higher education institutions.

Furthermore, the results of this study contribute to practice. The outcomes create a greater awareness of the effect cultural intelligence has on intercultural teams. The results can be practically used by policy makers as input for an internationalization policy. Furthermore, the results provide insights for HRM on how to support managers of international teams in the internationalization process. An understanding of what is happening in international teams regarding cultural intelligence eases the facilitation process for HRM.

## 1.4  Research Strategy

This research was conducted through single case study methodology. In single case study methodology, research is conducted in only one research unit and subjects are analyzed in-depth (Ghauri, 2004). Case studies enable researchers to provide in-depth information and create a better understanding of a phenomenon (Zainal, 2007). Yin (1984) distinguished three types of case studies: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. The research in this case is of an exploratory nature, because this is the most appropriate type if the aim is to further explore a phenomenon and gain insights into a subject. Since the amount of research regarding internationalization in higher education is limited, exploratory research is suitable.

## 1.5  Structure of the Report

This thesis consists of six chapters. The second chapter offers a theoretical background of cultural intelligence and internationalization in higher education. Chapter three follows with a description of the methodology used to conduct this research, the specific case and the participants. The fourth chapter gives an overview of the findings, which are discussed in chapter five. This thesis finishes with a conclusion in which the research question is answered.

# 2 Literature Review

This chapter provides a theoretical background of internationalization in higher education and cultural intelligence. First of all, dimensions of internationalization in higher education are described, followed by motivations for internationalization in higher education. Subsequently, a section is devoted to the practical side of internationalizing higher education institutions, followed by an explanation of the concept of cultural intelligence. Next, a number of options on how to develop cultural intelligence are highlighted and the last section is devoted to the role of HRM in internationalization.

## 2.1 Internationalization in Higher Education

Internationalization and globalization are two constructs that are often used interchangeably, but are two different things. Globalization (regarding higher education) is the total of economic, political and social forces that pushes higher education institutions in a more international direction nowadays. Globalization has led to the 'knowledge society' which refers to a tremendous growth in the service sector and the rising demand for knowledge products and more highly skilled employees from all over the world. Due to globalization, English became the first language for scientists and the labor market became international (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Globalization is reinforced by the creation of a free trade global marketplace without much regulation (Jones, 1988). Internationalization, on the other hand, is concerned with developing structures to enhance the universal welfare and refers to strategies, practices and policies that institutions use to deal with globalization (Altbach, 2015).

Rudzki (1995) distinguishes four dimensions in the internationalization process of higher education institutions: organizational change, curriculum innovation, staff development and student mobility. The first dimension, *organizational change*, refers to the necessity for universities to adapt to environmental changes. Higher education institutions need to develop themselves quickly in order not to stagnate and thus there is a constant need for strategic planning. The second, *curriculum innovation*, refers to the integration of important knowledge and study methods into the education. A distinction can be made between internal and external curriculum innovation. Internal refers to new courses, extra investment in teaching students more languages in the programs, changes in teaching methods and studies, and new ways of assessing and encouraging internships.

External curriculum innovation refers to movability of credit accumulation, joint qualifications and offering (online) courses abroad to enable students from other countries to get a certain degree without having to move. The third dimension is *staff development*. Activities regarding staff development may include the facilitation of staff to learn other languages, financial support to visit conferences, encouragement to invest in research, staff exchanges, guest speakers, training (for example in teaching foreign students) and investment in recruitment of international staff. The last dimension, *student mobility*, refers to the physical as well as the intellectual mobility of students. Activities regarding student mobility include attracting overseas students, exchange programs, encouragement of transnational student meetings, field trips and ecouraging students to learn a different language.

## 2.2 Internationalization in Higher Education: Why?

There has been an enormous growth in the global economy and complexity and competitiveness have increased dramatically. The need for intercultural and international understanding and knowledge increases and internationalization has become a necessity more than a possibility (Bartell, 2003). There are a number of reasons for higher education institutions to invest in internationalization.

First of all, the globalized world demands students to be internationally oriented and students need to be prepared for the international labor market (Qiang, 2003). Another important observation is the rising number of young people demanding access to universities worldwide (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Therefore, universities need to invest in activities to enhance internationalization in teaching, research and service. Besides academic knowledge, gaining intercultural skills has become very important as well (De Wit, 1999). Furthermore, universities invest in internationalization for academic reasons. Universities aim to increase knowledge and research and to improve cultural understanding (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Since universities aim to meet international standards regarding research, internationalization is beneficial because international activities might contribute to better human, technical or management systems (Knight, 1997). A third type of motivation is economic. The main motivation for nonprofit universities to invest in internationalization is not to make money but, more importantly, to gain a strong competitive position. Investing in internationalization (exchanges, international studies and sponsorships for foreign students) improves the

competitiveness of universities (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Subsequently, students are seen as beneficial to the universities' income and tend to have a positive economic effect on the host country (Knight, 1997). The last motivation is cultural/social. As a logical consequence of globalization, a diverse mix of cultures arises in student groups as well as in the workforce. This motivation inspires some universities to respect and embrace cultural and ethnic diversity (Knight, 1997).

Some universities are more internationally focused than others. Some study fields, especially the ones with a universal language such as mathematics, are more international than fields like social sciences which are more focused on their own, 'national' approach (Bartell, 2003). Furthermore, Qiang (2003) adds that the way in which internationalization is approached differs per country. Each country has its own unique history, culture, priorities and national identity which leads to a different approach to internationalization.

## 2.3  Internationalization in Higher Education: How?

There are several aspects that need to be considered when it comes to successful implementation of an internationalization policy (Rudzki, 1995). First of all it should be ensured that expectations of management, staff and students are aligned. Management wants to create a competitive organization, students want to be prepared for the international labor market and staff wants job security and career development. All staff members should be included in internationalization activities. Another important aspect is the allocation of resources, such as finance, staff, offices and accomodation, to realize the strategy. It is often thought that investing in activities regarding internationalization is expensive, but some activities can save money, for example when staff goes abroad for a conference and visit students at the same time. Other activities can generate income, for example facilitating courses for foreign students or summer courses. Furthermore, some activities are eligible for funding from governments or businesses. The most important aspect in the internationalization process is the way in which staff deals with internationalization. If staff members do not have the right focus and the desired attitude towards internationalization, ideas will never become reality. Management need to spread the internationalization policy to every level in the university and discuss the policy with employees to create awareness, acceptance and motivation. It is helpful to attract staff with a specific international brief, perfect control of foreign languages and

experience in overseas teaching. Furthermore, it is recommended to focus the development of staff on internationalization as well. Lastly, it is important to observe the progress in the internationalization process to be able to intervene, to ensure a successful implementation (Rudzki, 1995).

Some issues, however, arise after the implementation of the internationalization policy. Internationalization brings challenges for multicultural work teams, since many people experience difficulties in adapting to other cultures (Earley & Gibson, 2002). Therefore it is important to know how to deal with those challenges. As Earley & Gibson (2002, p. 15) described: "*If we accept the idea that the globalization and international integration of companies is inevitable, then business and its study is at a crossroads of understanding. It is no longer acceptable to proceed with the study of teams as if its members are isolated from their cultural and national heritage".* An important construct here is *Cultural Intelligence*, which is further explained in chapter 2.4.

## 2.4 Cultural Intelligence

Most organizations have become very culturally diverse and there has been an increase in cross-cultural contact. People from all over the world, with different backgrounds, cultures, languages, ethnicities and religions work together in teams (Earley & Gibson, 2002). When people from different cultures work together, organizations are confronted with several challenges, since many people experience difficulties in adapting to different cultural contexts. This has been the case for a few decades now, but rapid globalization has led to many more employees experiencing cross-cultural difficulties in their work (Ng, Van Dyne, Ang & Ryan, 2012). People need cultural intelligence skills to deal with cultural differences (Crowne, 2008).

Cultural intelligence is a relatively new concept but, in a short time, has experienced a noticeable growth in importance (Ng, Van Dyne, Ang & Ryan, 2012). Earley and Ang (2003) were the first to introduce the concept and defined it as follows: "*Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts and thus refers to a form of situated intelligence where intelligently adaptive behaviors are culturally bound to the values and beliefs of a given society or culture*" (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 26).

Cultural intelligence predicts the effectiveness of multicultural teams, cultural adaptation and expatriate performance. Therefore, it is crucial to understand why some individuals adapt easier to new cultural contexts and others do not (Van Dyne et al, 2012). In the literature on cultural intelligence, four dimensions of CQ are distinguished: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational and behavioral (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). In later research, Van Dyne, Ang, Ng, Rockstuhl, Tan and Koh (2012) related several subdimensions to each of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence.

**Cognitive** cultural intelligence refers to the understanding of cultures and interaction with people from different cultures. Cognitive CQ is the degree to which an individual understands the idea of culture and the differences across societies (Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010). It is related to self-awareness and openness to learning about new cultures. A person needs to be able to adjust his opinion and self-image. Furthermore, someone needs to be able to recognize different situations and interpret them while considering their context (Earley & Ang, 2003). Cognitive cultural intelligence consists of two subdimensions: culture-general knowledge and context-specific knowledge. Culture-general knowledge is knowledge of the main elements that shape a cultural environment. Context-specific knowledge is knowledge of how culture is established in a specific area and of how to be effective in that specific area. This helps people to quickly understand and adapt to a new cultural context (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

**Metacognitive** cultural intelligence refers to the ability to make sense of different cultures. It is about taking time to observe the situation, to think about one's thinking processes and to use cultural knowledge to create an understanding of a new cultural context, and solve problems in that case. Metacognitive cultural intelligence consists of three subdimensions: awareness, planning and monitoring (Van Dyne et al, 2012). Awareness means knowing what is going on in one's self and in others. Planning means anticipating on how to approach people and situations. Monitoring is checking if plans and expectations were appropriate, comparing the experience with the expectations (Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010). Metacognitive CQ is important because it promotes active thinking and because it allows people to revise their 'mental maps', which makes it easier for them to understand other people (Van Dyne, Ang & Koh, 2008).

**Motivational** cultural intelligence refers to the drive someone has to adapt to a different cultural context and if someone has the confidence and drive to work through the challenges related to this new cultural context. It is often assumed that people are automatically motivated, but that is not the case (Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010). Motivational cultural intelligence consists of three subdimensions: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and self-efficacy (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Intrinsic motivation refers to enjoying culturally diverse situations. Extrinsic motivation refers to the benefits an individual can gain from cross-cultural experiences. Self-efficacy refers to the confidence an individual has that cross-cultural experiences will be successful (Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010). A person with a higher level of self-efficacy is able to deal better with new situations in different cultures and is confident that the collaboration with other people will work out. Perseverance is important because people working in a multicultural organization will face more difficulties in their work than people who work in culturally homogenous organizations, and thus continuation is important (Earley & Ang, 2003).

**Behavioral** cultural intelligence refers to the ability to act appropriately in different cultural contexts. Behavior that is appropriate in one cultural setting may be unsuitable in another. Therefore, it is important that people adapt their behavior to the specific context. A culturally intelligent person knows which actions, verbal and nonverbal, will and will not enhance effectiveness in cross-cultural settings (Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010). Actions prove that someone really understands the culture of the other. The other people, in turn, become more open and trusting (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Behavioral cultural intelligence consists of three subdimensions: types and range of verbal behaviors, types and range of nonverbal expressions and specific speech acts (the words and phrases used to communicate). Verbal behavior refers to flexibility in vocalization: accent, tone, speed, volume and so on. Non-verbal behavior refers to flexibility in communication via gestures, expressions, body language, eye contact etc. Speech acts refers to flexibility in the way specific types of messages are communicated, for example invitations, apologies or saying 'no'. This includes the choice of words, the directness and the force of the communication (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

## 2.5 Increasing Cultural Intelligence

According to Triandis (2006), people can learn to adapt to new cultural contexts, but it requires training. People need to place themselves in the shoes of people from another culture and then think about why other people have different norms, in order to be able to adapt to a new cultural context. By doing this people can learn to critically reflect on the values of their own culture and be more open-minded about other cultures. This will improve the collaboration between people from different cultures. Crowne (2008) agrees on this by stating that training is one of the most important features for international employees to be successful. If a person is psychologically healthy and professionally competent, cultural intelligence can be developed (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to find out the best way to train their employees in becoming more cultural intelligent. Triandis (2006) states cultural intelligence requires metacognitive, cognitive, affective and behavioral training.

Training the cognitive aspect can be done by using culture assimilators and other knowledge-based training systems. The focus in cognitive training is typically on gaining cultural knowledge. Techniques for doing that might be lectures, movies, reading materials and case studies. Experiential training, in which participants join in workshops with exercises that will increase their understanding of the other person's culture, are especially helpful in creating a better mutual understanding. Furthermore, people should learn to ask questions about the other culture. Learning some of the language of the other country can also be helpful. Lastly, self-awareness training helps increase the participant's awareness of their own values, attitudes and behaviors, but also those of other cultures. This, in turn, enhances the collaboration between people with differing cultural backgrounds (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

In training the metacognitive aspect the focus is on skill development. The three competencies belonging to the metacognitive dimensions are planning, monitoring and evaluating. *Planning* refers to a capability to generate cognitive structures and strategies. A culturally intelligent person needs to know, for example, the rules for greetings and physical contact across different cultures. Culturally intelligent people need to know how to apply their knowledge in different cultures. *Monitoring* refers to the capability to reason, to formulate hypotheses and to monitor signals. Culturally intelligent individuals are able to focus on inconsistencies and to adjust their knowledge to integrate the new

culture. The last competence is *evaluating* and refers to focusing on the ability to learn about one's own learning. Culturally intelligent individuals are able to critically reflect on their own performance in cultural interactions. Cultural assimilators can be used to increase a person's metacognitive skills, but techniques focusing on reasoning, thinking styles and learning styles are useful as well. Cultural assimilators show participants scenarios (examples of culture clashes between people from different cultures) and ask them to interpret the specific situation. Afterwards, the participants are offered some other explanations to think about different ways to explain specific situations. Cultural assimilators are helpful in developing multicultural perspectives for people that work with people from different cultures (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

Training the motivational aspect focuses on cultural values. Training should provide knowledge about a culture, but should develop empathy as well. Another very important aspect is self-efficacy. This can be developed by building a trainee's confidence toward intercultural interaction by guiding the individual through some successful interactions with a new culture. This can be done by exposing an individual to a number of controlled intercultural interactions in a classroom setting. The difficulty of the interactions increases as the self-efficacy of the trainee increases. Once a person has enough self-efficacy, he will persevere and tackle cultural challenges (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

Behavioral training refers to behavior-shaping techniques to help people deal better with people from other cultures. The focus here is on developing behavioral competencies through simulations and role-plays for example. People practice in showing behaviors that fit the other culture; verbal as well as non-verbal. Reward and punishment can be used to effectuate behavioral change. Individuals trying to increase their CQ let go of their old habits and obtain new sets of behaviors which better fit the other culture (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

The primary responsibility for increasing cultural intelligence of employees in higher education institutions belongs to the team managers. Managers play a crucial role in the internationalization process since they manage their teams on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for the execution of HR practices on the operational level (Green, 2007). Since managers  have a great influence on the behavior of their employees, it is important to explore which techniques they use to help their employees adapt  to new cultural contexts.

## 2.6 The Role of HRM in Internationalization

To succeed in the global economy, organizations need to invest in the behavior of their employees, rather than in strategic planning at corporate headquarters. But organizations participating in the global economy are facing a lot of 'people challenges' (Pucik, 1997). Managing diverse human resources might be the biggest challenge for the HRM-department in international organizations (Benschop, 2001). Since employee behavior is crucial for success, HRM needs to be an essential partner in the globalization process. HRM needs to develop a 'global mindset' of encouraging and valuing the cultural diversity of employees. Cross-border interaction is at the core of a successful international organization and therefore cultural understanding is necessary. It is HRM's responsibility to provide and implement the essential policies to create cultural understanding (Pucik, 1997).

People from different socio-cultural backgrounds work together, which can cause difficulties in the collaboration. HRM activities in international organizations should focus on cultural acceptance and optimal adaptation resulting in actions which strengthen group performance (Benschop, 2001). HRM should support managers of international teams in establishing strategies, structures and practices to make sure international employees are able to deal with differences effectively. Therefore, according to Choy (2007), the programs need to create awareness and increase social consciousness. Furthermore, there should be diversity education in the workplace so foreigners will not feel excluded. Subsequently, an internal system should be established which encourages employing a diversity of staff from different socio-cultural backgrounds. Lastly, through communication, managers need to help their employees understand and appreciate one another and learn from each other's knowledge and experiences. This will help employees understand different situations, ways of thinking and create norms for intercultural interaction (Choy, 2007).

When it comes to enhancing cultural intelligence, HRM should take responsibility for effective collaboration by people from different cultures in one team. According to Friedman (2007), their job is to implement best practices in order to create alignment across different cultural environments. HRM should support the managers of international teams in the internationalization process by creating alignment across different cultures and in helping employees to communicate effectively. Furthermore,

HRM is responsible for getting the best out of employees by checking if training is needed and providing efficient training programs. Subsequently, HRM should increase awareness for cultural differences in diverse workforces (Friedman, 2007).

However, the above described literature might overrate the role of HRM in higher education institutions. HR departments in higher education institutions mainly function as staff departments serving the management team, instead of having their own responsibilities as described above. Furthermore, it is doubtful if the role of HRM as outlined above is the desired role of HRM in higher education institutions, since team leaders in higher education institutions are independent and highly educated professionals who prefer to handle their matters themselves. Therefore, it is questionable if a strongly active and assertive HR department is desired.

## 2.7 Research Model

The relationship between techniques that managers apply and cultural intelligence of their employees is displayed in figure 1. The purpose of this study is to explore which techniques managers use to help their employees adapt to a new cultural context.

*Figure 1: Research Model*
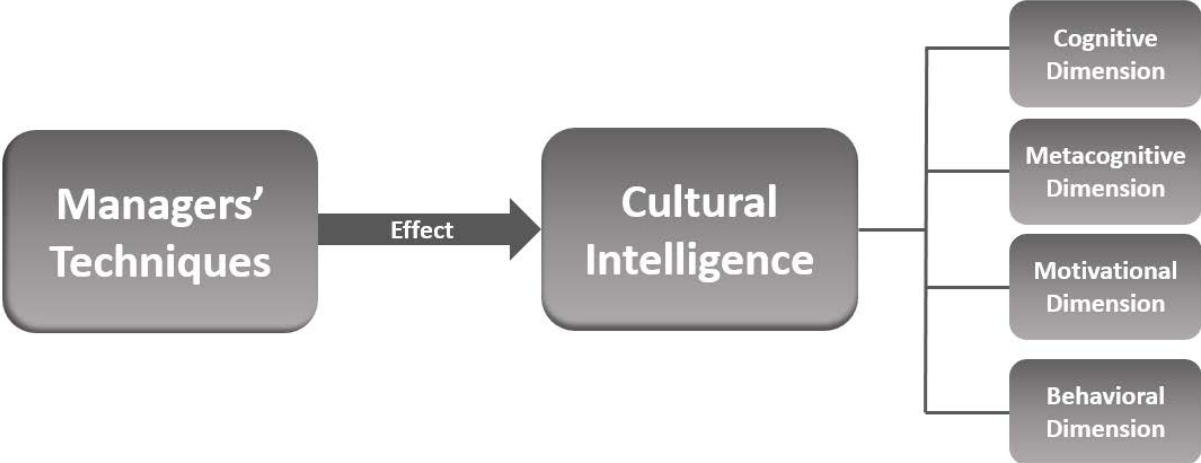
# 3 Methodology

This chapter explains how the research was conducted. First of all the objective of the research is described, followed by an elaboration on the specific research method: a single case study. The third section is devoted to the specific case in this research: the University of Twente. In the two following parts it is explained how data was collected and how participants were selected. Thereafter the data analysis is described and the last section elaborates on the operationalization.

## 3.1 Research Objective

The primary goal of this research was to understand what managers of international research teams in higher education institutions do to help their international employees adapt to new cultural contexts. Furthermore, this research aimed to understand how HRM can support the managers of these international teams in the internationalization process.

## 3.2 Research Method

This research was conducted by the use of case study methodology, because this method enables researchers to analyze subjects in-depth (Ghauri, 2004) and gain a better understanding of a certain phenomenon (Zainal, 2007). A case study is "*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.*" (Yin, 1984, p. 23).

The case study in this research is of *exploratory* nature, which is the most applicable type since the amount of research regarding internationalization in higher education is limited. The aim of the research was to further explore the phenomenon of cultural intelligence and to gain insights in how managers of international teams can help their employees adapt to new cultural contexts. Therefore, an exploratory case study is most suitable (McCutcheon & Meredith, 1993).

Since data in this research was gathered from one organization to achieve the research objective, the research in this case is called a *single* exploratory case study (Dul & Hak, 2007). The first advantage of this type is that data will be collected within the context where the activities actually take place, therefore there is less chance of a distortion of reality (Yin, 1984). Furthermore, this way of data collection is less disruptive for

organizations than for example experiments (Lee, 1999). The in-depth and local contextualization enables researchers to make detailed observations and detect specific events (Allport, 1961).

## 3.3 The Case – University of Twente

The University of Twente is a university located in Enschede, The Netherlands. The university was founded in 1961 as the 'Technische Hogeschool Twente' and was named University of Twente (UT) in 1986. The UT is a research university and focuses on technological developments and the importance of those developments for people and society. The university distinguishes itself by offering both technical curricula and social studies, which is reflected in the slogan 'High tech, human touch'.

The campus in the Twente region currently welcomes 9,600 students and employs more than 2,900 scientists and professional support staff. The university is divided into five faculties:

1. Behavioral Management and Social Sciences (BMS)
2. Engineering Technology (CTW)
3. Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science (EEMCS/EWI)
4. Science and Technology (TNW)
5. Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC) (University of Twente, 2016).

The UT was selected as the case for this research, since internationalization is a hot topic in their current organizational strategy. The university aspires to obtain a stronger international position, among other things to compensate for the expected lack of knowledge capital on the local labor market. Therefore the UT aims to attract and retain talented scientists from all over the world. Furthermore, the UT attempts to teach students the skills and abilities to become global citizens (Strubbe, 2015).

The strengthening of the University of Twente Strategy to fulfill its internationalization ambitions should ultimately lead to a university in which 'internationalization' has become an inseparable attribute to education, the composition of the population and all other aspects of the university by 2020 (Strubbe, 2015).

The UT wants HRM to support this process of internationalization and to take a leading role in making the UT 'the most welcoming University' for foreign employees. To find out

in which areas HRM could specifically be helpful, one of the HR policy advisors has set up work sessions with a group of people directly connected to international employees, to talk about their experiences and ideas about internationalization. These sessions showed three main themes in internationalization: information & communication, services & organization and behavior (Strubbe, 2015).

This research focused on the last theme: Behavior. The work sessions showed that preparing international employees for their work in the new country is a very important focus point. But not only preparing them proved important, also the behavior and service attitude of the local employees is important. International employees experienced contact with their local coworkers as difficult. Local employees did not always show understanding for the questions of their international coworkers. Furthermore it appeared that the informal communication at work is mostly in the local language. To enhance the awareness and the mutual understanding, the organization needs to be prepared for an international organizational culture. Cultural intelligence might play an important role here (Strubbe, 2015). Since there has been no research conducted so far on how managers of international teams in higher education institutions can develop cultural intelligence of their team members, the University of Twente seemed a suitable case for this research.

## 3.4  Data Collection Procedure

In this research data was collected from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary sources refer to interviews, secondary sources refer to documents (McCutcheon & Meredith, 1993). Primary data were gathered by the use of semi-structured interviews with managers of international teams. The choice for semi-structured interviews was made because of the possibility to deepen the questions and the answers, while still holding on to a certain structure, and the possibility to change the direction of the interview when needed (Lee, 1999). The interviews were recorded and transcribed to create the most reliable representation of the reality.

Secondary data on the UT was gathered through the following UT reports and statements:

- Mission statement UT;
- Vision 2020;
- The most welcoming university;

- HR Strategy.

This data provided information about the context of internationalization at the UT and was helpful in focusing on certain areas in this research and to select the right respondents.

To ensure the quality of this research, data and theory triangulation were used. Triangulation refers to the collection of data by using different methods to create a complete and coherent picture of the case. This enhances the correct interpretation of the study. Data triangulation refers to multiple data sources and theory triangulation refers to including different perspectives on the data (Yin, 2009).

## 3.5 Selection of Participants

The primary data (semi-structured interviews) was gathered from managers of international teams at the University of Twente. In order to decide which managers to interview, the composition of each faculty with regard to nationality was analyzed first. Table 1 shows the distribution of nationalities (Local/European/Non-European) of employees per faculty in absolute numerals and in percentages. Table 1 shows that each faculty might contain interesting (international!) teams to study.

*Table 1: distribution nationalities per faculty*

| Faculty | Total | NL | EU | Non EU | % WP | % NL | % EU | % non EU | % non NL |
|---------|-------|-----|----|--------|-------|-------|-------|----------|----------|
| BMS | 491 | 391 | 61 | 39 | 79,8% | 79,6% | 12,4% | 7,9% | 20,4% |
| ET | 393 | 253 | 48 | 92 | 81,7% | 64,4% | 12,2% | 23,4% | 35,6% |
| EWI | 471 | 327 | 56 | 88 | 77,1% | 69,4% | 11,9% | 18,7% | 30,6% |
| ITC | 234 | 129 | 43 | 62 | 70,9% | 55,1% | 18,4% | 26,5% | 44,9% |
| TNW | 577 | 398 | 71 | 108 | 67,1% | 69,0% | 12,3% | 18,7% | 31,0% |

Subsequently an analysis of all teams of all faculties was made to find which teams were the most internationally diverse. Since the goal of this research is to find techniques regarding cultural intelligence in international teams, it is important to select teams with a proportional composition of local and non-local employees and a diverse composition of nationalities. International teams were selected based on two criteria. The first criterion is the percentage of international employees in each team. First, all teams with more than 30% international employees were selected. The second criterion was the minimum number of different nationalities in each team. From the selection of teams with

more than 30% international employees, the teams with a minimum of 6 different nationalities were selected. This delivered a selection of 32 teams, of which the team leaders were invited for an interview. 20 of the managers were able to participate, which resulted in a response rate of 62.5%.

## 3.6 Operationalization

The interview questions were constructed based on the theory described in chapter 2. The complete operationalization of the constructs, which underlie the interview questions, can be found in table 2 below.

*Table 2: Operationalization of the constructs*

| Dimension | Sub-dimension | Indicator |
|---|---|---|
| Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence | Planning | Developing action plans before interacting with people from another culture to ensure an effective interaction. |
| Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence | Awareness | Being aware of how someone's culture influences the interaction with people from another culture. |
| Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence | Monitoring | Adjusting the understanding of a culture while interacting with people from another culture and knowing how to adjust behavior when the interaction is not effective. |
| | | |
| Cognitive Cultural Intelligence | Culture-general Knowledge | Knowing the elements that shape a culture and understanding the different cultural value frameworks that explain behaviors. |
| Cognitive Cultural Intelligence | Context-specific Knowledge | Knowing how cultures are established in specific areas and knowing how to be effective in specific contexts. |
| | | |
| Motivational Cultural Intelligence | Intrinsic Interest | Enjoying interaction with people from other cultures. |
| Motivational Cultural Intelligence | Extrinsic Interest | Valuing benefits gained by working in a multicultural team (e.g. status). |
| Motivational Cultural Intelligence | Self-efficacy | Being confident interaction with different cultures will be effective. |
| | | |
| Behavioral Cultural Intelligence | Verbal Behavior | Changing the use of accents, speed, pause and silence to suit other cultures. |
| Behavioral Cultural Intelligence | Non-verbal Behavior | Adjusting expressions, gestures, body language, eye contact etc. to the culture of the person you are interacting with. |
| Behavioral Cultural Intelligence | Speech Acts | Adjusting specific forms of communications to the other person's culture by changing words, directness and power, for example the way in which you show the other person you disagree. |

In order to create a coherent picture, the interviews started with a few general questions regarding background, education and international experience of the manager and the composition of the team. Thereafter, questions regarding different phases of employment of international employees (selection, onboarding, year reviews) followed to obtain a comprehensive image of how employees are supervised. Furthermore, collaboration and intercultural interaction within the team were discussed to learn more about the way (international) employees interact. The complete list of interview questions can be found in appendix 1. Table 3 shows which interview questions were directly related to one of the dimensions of cultural intelligence.

*Table 3: Interview questions related to the dimensions of cultural intelligence*

| Dimension | Interview question |
|---|---|
| Metacognitive & Cognitive Cultural Intelligence | 1. What are focus points in the selection process when hiring new employees? Which role does culture play here?<br>2. Which role does culture play in the onboarding process?<br>3. Which factors do you take into account to make sure a new international colleague functions optimally?<br>4. Based on which choices do you create sub teams within your team? Which role does culture play here? |
| Motivational Cultural Intelligence | 1. To what extent do people collaborate within your team?<br>2. How do you stimulate intercultural interaction within your team?<br>3. What do you need to effectively stimulate intercultural interaction within your team? |
| Behavioral Cultural Intelligence | 1. How do you take the culture of the employee into account when preparing and conducting year reviews?<br>2. How do you take culture into account during meetings?<br>3. Which role does culture play in the collaboration between the members of your team?<br>4. Which difficulties regarding cultural differences do you experience in the collaboration between team members? How do you deal with this? |

## 3.7  Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure was a linear process, which means data was first collected and then interpreted. All interviews were recorded and thereafter transcribed to obtain a factual report of the interview. The transcripts were first carefully read individually. The next step was reading the transcripts with two researchers together to look for categories in the data which could form codes for the analysis. After this first categorization the axial coding started, where the transcripts were read again and some codes were merged together where others were divided into two separate codes and all quotes were assigned to one or more codes. Lastly, the final codes and quotes were inserted into a table and each code was summarized to create a better overview.

# 4 Findings

## 4.1 Cultural Intelligence in Higher Education Institutions

Managers in this case manage a very internationally diverse team. They describe themselves as non-hierarchical, supportive and coaching, and state that the relationship between manager and employee is based on equality. Some of the teams consist of more non-local employees than local employees. It is striking that some managers were surprised by the fact that their team is one of the top 30 most international teams of the university. As one of them said:

"Well, first of all I am very surprised that we are such an international group. I never actually realized. But that can be explained by the fact that I am in the middle of this group, and when you are in the middle you don't realize how international you are, it is just normal." [R3]

One of the faculties seems to be outstanding since it only operates in international environments. None of the managers there were surprised by the fact that they were such an international group. Some managers of other faculties even recommended to watch how the specific faculty approaches internationalization and learn from their approach.

"Since I work here, I only work in international context. All students are international and the whole faculty is very international in general. Our faculty is very well-known worldwide, while the university is not." [R11]

"That faculty has such a long international tradition and a much larger number of international employees. We could watch them if we want to learn, because they are very successful when it comes to internationalization." [R12]

Managers consider internationalization as a natural thing, since they all work in the scientific field, which has never been anything but international. Most of them have never worked in teams that were not international and they would consider it strange if a scientific team was not international. Managers state that they and their team members do not even look at each other's nationality, but only at their professional quality.

"It's just…science is international. It does not matter if you are Russian, American, Chinese or Dutch. Everybody speaks English. The language of science is broken English. It is needless to say we are international, that is just our field." [R4]

"It's all natural. There are no geographical borders in science. We do not see nationality, we see a scientist and we judge our colleagues on the quality of their research, not on where they come from. We are professionals; that is what matters." [R7]

Furthermore, most managers are very open to new, foreign employees and consider it a pleasure to lead an international team. The combination of different people, nationalities and cultures within one team is seen as an enrichment and managers are proud of their team's diversity. Cultural differences are considered as something valuable and beneficial, since it creates a broader perspective and new opportunities.

"Having all those cultures in the group is always like a breath of fresh air. It is a really nice perspective, a huge enrichment, I just love it. We really embrace the diversity." [R6]

"I maintain a very welcoming policy. When someone asks us for the possibilities to join our team as a guest researcher and what that person does is in some way linked to the profession of our scientists, the answer is always yes. So instead of being restrictive, we open our doors and welcome everybody. It enriches our activities." [R1]

"When someone from Africa works on a project with someone from Asia, you notice those people differ. But that does not mean the collaboration does not work. Bringing different disciplines together creates many new opportunities; that is our strength." [R11]

Managers acknowledge that working in an international team involves some intercultural differences, but they perceive the differences between characters and personalities more significant than differences between cultures. Therefore, the focus in the interaction with a colleague lies on personality instead of culture.

"I do not take culture into account, I take personality into account. It is not like I am talking to culture, I am talking to a person. Some people are way more sensitive than others. That does not have anything to do with culture." [R3]

"It is about the individuals. You should not link them to their culture, especially not the prejudices you have about a certain culture. You just need to see them as individuals." [R1]

Although managers value diversity, some of them seem to doubt about the financial benefits of internationalization, considering the amount of time and money associated with the internationalization process.

"Internationalization is a beautiful thing, but you should realize what effort you have to make. It takes an awful lot of time. I think people are right when they ask for a cost-benefit analysis and want to see how beneficial this internationalization thing really is." [R2]

Furthermore, managers mention the administrative burden associated with attracting new international people as a practical limitation to being open to new, international employees. Managers state that hiring foreign employees, especially when they come from outside the European Union, involves many administrative policies regarding

insurances, residence permits and contracts that need to be handled. Managers consider this a burden and state all these policies might therefore result in avoiding to welcome international people to the team.

Lastly, managers are very strict in keeping the balance between nationalities. They aim to protect the mix of nationalities within the team, to ensure the balance and to prevent one nationality from becoming a separate community within the team.

"Sometimes, there are too many people from Korea, so that becomes a subculture. Or too many people from China, or India or Spain. So we try to mix it up and keep the balance" [R4]

## 4.2 Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence is considered important and managers feel responsible for encouraging interaction within their teams. However, managers do not explicitly emphasize cultural intelligence in their leadership, since they perceive it as a natural process. The study showed that most new employees are already used to international environments when they start working at the university since the field of science has always been international. Managers aim to increase the cultural intelligence of employees by using a number of strategies. A first important general technique which does not specifically belong to one of the dimensions of cultural intelligence is role-modeling by the managers. In order to be able to increase cultural intelligence of employees, managers consider it important to have a high degree of cultural intelligence themselves. All managers have gained previous international experience. Many of them have studied, worked and lived in another country for a few years. The ones who did not gained international experience by visiting other countries for conferences and work-related projects. Managers who have worked in other countries all mentioned the importance of having that experience in order to manage an international team. They state that they need to be able to open up to other cultures and need to understand which challenges arise when people from different cultures work together, hence it is helpful when they themselves have lived in another country. This makes it easier to understand people when they come up with something you would not expect from a local perspective. Managers even suggest selecting new team leaders based on international experience.

"I think it will be very hard if you did not live in another international context yourself. I think that it is the most essential part. By living in other countries you enlarge your awareness and that automatically makes it easier to deal with people from other cultural backgrounds" [R11]

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"I have been in weird situations in other countries, and that enables me to better manage my people now. It is crazy to experience a situation which everyone finds normal except for you, while no one notices you find it strange. I guess I do not see everything my people find strange, but I know and I understand that feeling" [R20]

Further techniques that managers of international teams use to help their employees adapt to a new cultural context are described on the basis of the four identified dimensions of cultural intelligence.

### 4.2.1 The Cognitive and Metacognitive Dimension

Managers state that the international employees bring a high degree of cognitive and metacognitive cultural intelligence with them and therefore adapt quickly to the local culture. This can be attributed to the fact that employees are all highly educated and belong to those most privileged in their own country and community. They are all intelligent, ambitious and talented, usually have international experience and are used to adapting to another culture. Employees understand and accept that people differ and most of them know how to interact in different situations effectively.

"We are all highly educated, it is not like we are dealing with extreme people. People here are very understanding and give each other space." [R5]

"It is just such an international and open group. Everybody knows everyone has a different cultural background which leads to some differences, but we just accept it." [R16]

A first technique that managers use is selection for cognitive cultural intelligence. Managers look for certain personality traits in candidates which they believe will help them adapt quickly to a different cultural context. They look for social, independent, robust, open and motivated candidates who take initiative and are good team players. Furthermore, managers check the English skills of candidates, to make sure few problems in communication will arise. Subsequently, managers make sure that the candidates they hire already possess some cognitive cultural intelligence by finding out if the candidates realize what it means to work in another country and to work with different nationalities.

"No matter the nationality, I check if they worked in an international team before and if they have worked outside their home country. That is very useful. To make sure it won't be a complete shock to them." [R13]

"I do not just take people straight out of China to do some projects here. That won't work. Such people miss the cultural knowhow to be effective in the Dutch context." [R5]

Once candidates are hired and start working in the team, several other tactics are applied to increase the cognitive and metacognitive cultural intelligence of the employees. When a new, international employee starts work, different methods are used to ensure the new employee quickly gets an idea of the local and the organizational culture. This will help the new employee to find ways of being effective in the specific context and their interaction with different people. This will enhance their integration within the group and the country. One of the tactics managers use is the 'buddy system' for new employees. The new employee gets assigned a more experienced employee, the buddy, to familiarize them with the country, the organization, the culture, the department and the work, and to involve them in social activities. Where possible, new employees are assigned a buddy from the same nationality, because they might face the same challenges. The buddy knows what is needed to help the new employee which might speed up the adaptation to the new cultural context. When the new employee conducts experiments, he is assigned an experienced employee who is working on the same project as a buddy, because they believe this will facilitate the integration of the new employee within the team. Managers also value the assistance of their secretaries for taking responsibilities when a new person enters the group, not only to familiarize the new person with different guidelines, but also to help out with practical matters like visa, housing and other forms that need to be filled out.

"We work with buddies, which means some person of the experienced group is assigned to keep an eye on the new one, to make sure they will be fine, won't be lonely, getting involved with social activities, etc. Just the central point of contact. If it is possible, we make sure the buddy is of the same nationality as the new one, because you see people adapt quicker". [R18]

In some teams this is not officially called a 'buddy system', but it is a more natural process within the team:

"I just introduce the new person and ask others to help the new one; that is such an automatic process, it is natural and self-evident. People just find each other very quick". [R4]

Another well-used tactic for the (meta)cognitive dimension is an introduction manual, which teams create and offer to new people. Those manuals contain all information about UT procedures, specific habits of the team and the country and other useful knowhow. This information will increase the cognitive cultural intelligence of the new employee.

Managers experience that their employees adapt quickly to the new cultural context. Everyone speaks English and respects that English is the official language in the work environment. The only language issue managers face is with PhD-students from Asia or Latin-America. Managers try to control it by offering those PhD-students English courses to enable them to be more effective in the interaction with colleagues and, of course, to improve the quality of their work. When it comes to speaking the local language, the opinions differ. Some managers find it very important that employees learn to speak the local language, to help them understand what is going on and be more effective in their interaction with people. Others, however, do not see the use of learning the local language, since the teams and the work have such an international focus.

Differences in religion are considered normal as well. Team leaders as well as employees understand and respect the differences between people and their background and are tolerant and respectful. Employees feel free to express their religion and other employees respect that. One example is that managers and colleagues are flexible in offering people the space to pray. However, when time schedules do not allow people to leave work to pray, they understand and are happy to come to a meeting and reschedule their prayer. Furthermore, managers emphasize the importance of respecting and accepting each other.

"Religion is not an issue, because freedom and tolerance are most important. I never had to intervene. Some of us use the praying opportunities, others just pray in their office, while their colleagues continue writing their articles." [R1]

"It just starts with respect. You do not need to blow up certain things, for example shaking hands or not. I would try to create an environment where everyone accepts each other instead of trying to prepare everyone for every difference, you don't need to make that an issue, just accept it." [R6]

### 4.2.2 The Motivational Dimension

Some managers consider it one of their most important tasks to stimulate the collaboration within their team and create opportunities where people can meet and interact in order to increase the motivational cultural intelligence of their employees. Social activities make employees enjoy the interaction with people from other cultures; they see it as an enrichment and will give them confidence that the interaction between people from different cultures will be effective. An often used technique for enhancing motivational cultural intelligence and stimulating cultural interaction is organizing or facilitating regular team events. Sometimes these events focus on team dynamics and

team building, but more often it is just a fun activity. This makes the collaboration between team members from different cultural backgrounds easier and the effect of these types of events is noticeable at work.

"I stimulate social activities outside of work. If people come up with an idea, I always say okay, we have some money to arrange that. After that, you notice those people get along better on the work floor" [R2]

However, other managers experience the social interaction a natural process, which does not need active stimulation:

"I don't actively stimulate social interaction, people organize events themselves. Sometimes I participate, but they organize it themselves. I don't hinder them, so I facilitate it, but it is a natural process." [R15]

Food is an important factor in intercultural interaction. Just having lunch together helps to enhance the interaction between different team members. Multicultural lunches or dinners seem to be a very popular and positive event:

"Every year on new year's we have a multicultural lunch, where everybody cooks his own traditional food and brings it to work. Then everyone explains what it is and everybody is so proud, people really take pride in bringing their culture into the group." [R20]

Managers value the effect of their social interaction efforts at work:

"The effect is very positive. People see that even the professor is a human being and during such an event you see everybody from a different perspective. We often do outdoor kind of things, where I [the professor] love to climb in trees and stuff like that." [R7]

Both local and non-local employees enjoy working with people from so many different cultures. Managers state that employees are very keen to help each other. Since many international team members experienced challenges in their starting phase, colleagues know what the new employee is going through. This results in an organizational culture where everyone enjoys welcoming and helping the new person and everyone is very helpful and friendly. They undertake social activities, but also help each other with more practical things like housing or buying a bicycle:

"People take care of each other. When you are in such an international team, everybody knows what it is like to start in a new environment. People are really open for new people, everybody likes it when new people arrive". [R5]

Almost every nationality has its own community in the local city. Some managers state that those communities are helpful in getting used to the new environment and the integration, since they function as a social safety net outside of work, in which people from the same national and cultural background help each other. The people in these communities can help each other with ideas on how to deal with specific local or other cultural habits:

"There are so many international people at the university that new international people connect with other people from their culture very quickly. In no time they find out where to find people from the same country. That is easy for us, because the others will familiarize the new ones with the country and the cultural differences" [R19]

However, other managers think these communities might also counteract the motivational aspect of cultural intelligence, since people will feel safe in their own community, spend a lot of time there and withdraw themselves from their team. All managers are focused on protecting the diversity of nationalities within the teams and want to prevent small communities to form within the teams. Keeping the mix starts in the selection process: managers try to attract people from different countries, since they want to prevent their international people from clustering only with people from the same nationality. For most managers, protecting the cultural balance also plays a role in the room allocation. Some managers assign employees an office only based on where there is a free spot, but most managers focus on ensuring the cultural balance in room allocation to prevent people from only speaking in their own language and to stimulate intercultural interaction.

"I would never put Chinese people in one office with other Chinese people. Split them up. If I do not do that, they will constantly speak Chinese. That hinders their progression in English and other people in the room will not understand what they are talking about." '[R14]

### 4.2.3  The Behavioral Dimension

Managers state that their employees are able to act appropriately in the interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds, since all employees are ambitious, intelligent and often already have international experience. Furthermore, managers argue that whenever issues in the interaction arise, they are caused by differences in personal characteristics most of the time and seldom by cultural differences. However, culture does play a role in the way people interact and behave, especially when it comes to hierarchy. Employees from some cultures are in general more used to strict hierarchical levels and

are very careful in voicing their opinion, have a passive attitude, would never call their manager by their first name and would never disagree with a person higher in the hierarchy. Local people, however, are used to egalitarian structures in which there are no strict hierarchical levels and where people do not hesitate to voice their opinion, speak up to their managers or colleagues whenever they disagree and take initiative. It is important for new employees to be aware of the differences in hierarchy between cultures and to know how to appropriately behave in those different settings. In this case, managers want their employees to voice their opinion which is something some people have to get used to.

"Asian people are a lot more modest and afraid to criticize the manager. The locals are used to that and appreciate it. It is better to have someone loudly voicing his opinion than someone who does not say anything and just watches how things go wrong. So it is very important to teach people to voice their opinion." [R4]

The technique managers use to enhance behavioral cultural intelligence is explaining their employees how the local culture works and that they expect people to take initiative, to come up with ideas and to voice their opinion, even if they disagree with the team leader. Managers argue that they want their employees to tell them when they have a different perspective on a certain topic. They also find it important to pay attention to those differences and offer international people the space and encouragement to voice their opinion.

"Those people are used to receiving orders. In the beginning you really need to push them forward. But it is important to keep talking with them, informal as well. You need them to trust you. Then they will see that others just call me by my first name and they will start doing that as well. You need to push them to constantly take the next step without me having to tell them." [R2]

### 4.2.4  Summary of the Section

Employees consider internationalization a natural thing, since the field of science has always been international and most employees are used to international work environments before they even start at the university. A number of techniques are used by managers to help their employees adapt to the new cultural context.  First of all, role-modeling by the team managers seems to be important, because this helps them understand the challenges associated with working in an international team. The second technique is selecting for (meta)cognitive cultural intelligence. Managers only hire employees that have the right personality traits to be able to adapt to new cultural

contexts effectively. Furthermore, only candidates who master the English language well and know what it means to work in another country and with different nationalities are selected. When new people are hired, the buddy-system is a well-used technique for enhancing the integration within the group and the country. Offering introduction manuals is helpful as well. In addition, managers stimulate interaction by organizing and facilitating social events. Lastly, an often used technique for enhancing behavioral cultural intelligence is taking time to explain new employees how the local culture works and how people are expected to behave here. These techniques will help the new employee to find ways to be effective in the local context and in the interaction with colleagues.

## 4.3 The Role of HRM

Some managers argue they never needed nor missed HR and are satisfied with the current situation. Other managers came up with suggestions where the HR department could support them in the internationalization process and specifically to enhance the cultural intelligence within their teams. First of all, managers would like HR support in facilitating and promoting courses and workshops. Language courses are often mentioned. Managers would like HR to facilitate and promote English courses to enable employees to communicate better, but also courses for the local language, to enhance the integration. Furthermore, managers would like HR to facilitate and promote intercultural training for employees. They state that the current available intercultural training is only focused on management, but they would like it to be available for each employee since these courses can help employees in dealing with different cultural contexts even better and enhance the cultural interaction even more:

> "HR could help organize or make people aware that there are intercultural awareness courses that could be followed. The training is often targeted at managers or at international staff coming in, but not at the national staff. I find it very strange. Even if the national staff is very experienced, there are still things they can learn. The awareness has to come from both sides. If those courses are available, I think HR could play a role in highlighting where people need these skills, in the intake stage. We always have an HR person in the intake committee, so they can pick things up and write it in their letter of offer that they should follow a training, that could be good" [R13]

Furthermore, it bothers managers that the support staff, which includes the HR department, does not seem to have an international orientation. Managers argue that the support staff within the university would benefit from a greater amount of international

experience much more than is currently the case. Also the fact the support staff often communicates in the local language is mentioned by managers.

"What really bothers me is that supportive staff continuously communicates in the local language. Policymakers send me notes about teaching in the local language. Then I tell them we have foreign people who I need to discuss it with, I need it to be in English. It is always the same story." [R12]

"I think the university's management has a problem. You should check to what extent the management and the faculties are international. The support staff is usually from the home country. That is where it starts. They should start hiring international colleagues. On team level internationalization is normal and natural, but the real internationalization is needed on a higher and more abstract level in this organization" [R4]

A more practical way HR could give support is with regard to housing, visa and finding jobs for partners of international employees. Managers would like HR to play a more active role here. One of the teams is currently collaborating with one HR employee, who comes over to the department one day a week to help international employees with practical and administrative matters. This is highly appreciated.

Subsequently, managers find it hard to value the qualifications of international candidates when hiring new international people, especially when they did not study at a European university. Managers face difficulties in comparing grades and courses from universities outside of Europe. Therefore, managers prefer to hire people with degrees from well-known universities. HR could play a role here and help managers in comparing grades and courses from universities worldwide, to simplify and improve the selection process.

Lastly, some managers would like HR to promote and stimulate associations where people who have the same interest or job come together, such as student associations, sport associations or associations for a specific nationality. These are important for employees to find social connections, to adapt to the local culture and to integrate within the organization. The PhD-association *P-nut* is a good example of an association where PhDs can get to know other PhDs and diversify their social circle. Some managers did not know if there were any associations, and thus could not stimulate their people to become members. However, it should be kept in mind that people should interact with people from all different cultures, and not only communicate with the people from their own nationality in their own association or community.

"Do associations for foreign people exist here? I have looked for it once, but couldn't find it. But one day I noticed all my Turkish people went to play soccer together. I would like to know about the existence of such associations, I really value that. I see it as HR's task to tell managers about those associations". [R9]

### 4.3.1 Summary of the Section

HR does not seem to play any part in the selection, training or management of international employees. Some managers never needed nor missed HR, but others would like HR to support them in the internationalization process. First of all, managers would like HR support for facilitating and promoting language courses and workshops regarding intercultural awareness. Furthermore, HR does not seem to have an international orientation and often communicates in the local language. In addition, managers would like more support from HR regarding housing, visa, finding jobs for partners of international employees and comparing grades and courses from universities from outside the European Union. Lastly, managers would like HR to promote and stimulate associations where people can come together, in order to enhance their integration.

# 5 Discussion

## 5.1 Reflection on Literature

The results show that internationalization is considered a natural phenomenon in science and that international diversity in the teams is highly valued. Differences in character are considered more significant than differences between cultures. This is surprising, since the literature states that international organizations face challenges because their employees experience difficulties in adapting to people from different backgrounds, cultures, religions and social classes (Ng, Van Dyne, Ang & Ryan, 2012; Triandis, 2006). An explanation may be that the teams in this study all consist of highly educated scientists, who are used to working in the international field of science. The respondents understand and accept that people differ and they have never worked in teams with only one nationality and thus did not feel like they have to adapt to different contexts; for them it is a natural occurrence. This may differ from previous studies which have been conducted in different sectors and organizations.

Several techniques are applied to help international employees adapt to new cultural contexts. First of all, role-modeling by the team managers seems to be important. The international experience of managers makes them aware of the challenges associated with working in an international team and helps them to deal with those challenges. Having team leaders with a global mindset is important, since internationalization of a higher education institution is often impeded when leaders do not view internationalization as relevant (Green, 2007). When it comes to the (meta)cognitive dimension, managers seem to select for cognitive cultural intelligence by making sure the candidates they select are already used to working with different nationalities, master the English language very well and have the personality traits that managers consider important to be able to adapt to diverse cultural contexts. Managers also use other strategies to enhance the cultural intelligence of their employees. They use buddy systems and introduction manuals to inform people about the local culture. According to Van Dyne et al (2012) this is useful, since employees need to gain extra knowledge to know how to be effective in the specific area. Managers could enhance the cognitive dimension even more by offering lectures, movies and reading materials to provide their employees with more knowledge about the local culture. The metacognitive dimension can be further developed by teaching employees to critically reflect on their own

performance and adjust where needed. Managers could facilitate this training in which cultural assimilators are used to discuss different scenarios. This might be helpful to develop multicultural perspectives (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

Managers invest in the motivational dimension as well, by making sure there are enough opportunities in which people can enjoy the interaction. These activities are appreciated and the effect is visible in the work environment. This is in line with the literature, which states that people adapt to new cultural contexts easier when interactions have proved that the intercultural interaction is successful (Earley & Peterson, 2004). When it comes to the behavioral dimension of cultural intelligence, the differences in the way employees behave towards others who have a higher hierarchical position play an important role. Managers in the local country want their employees to know how to deal with hierarchy in the local culture and the managers want them to be able to adjust their behavior. In this case managers want their employees to speak up to them whenever they disagree and take initiative. Therefore, managers constantly explain to their employees what they expect. Managers consider this the right way to help their international employees adapt to the new cultural context. According to the literature, behavioral training should focus on developing competencies by role-plays where employees practice the verbal and non-verbal behavior suitable for the local culture. This helps people to let go of their old habits and find new sets of behaviors which help them be more effective in the local culture (Earley & Peterson, 2004). A schematic overview of the techniques that managers use to enhance cultural intelligence of their employees is given in figure 2.

*Figure 2: Overview Techniques*
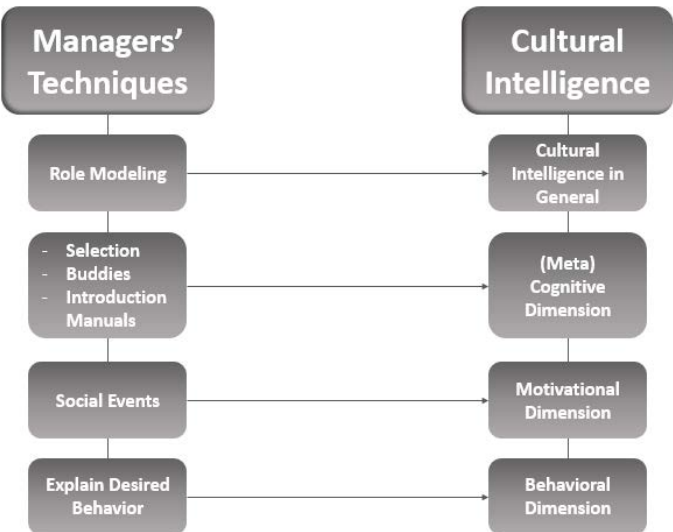
## 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

It is acknowledged that this study is not without limitations, but strategies were used to reduce them and they open possibilities for future research. First of all, case studies are associated with the risk of getting lost in data. Much had to be omitted to stay focused in the data, but since the coding was done by two junior researchers together instead of just one and the analysis was regularly discussed with other researchers, the risk was reduced and transparency was increased. Furthermore, the preliminary results were discussed with the HR department. A second possible limitation can be 'interviewer bias', where the verbal or non-verbal behavior of the researcher influences the responses. This was reduced by conducting the interviews with two interviewers.

This study aimed to find out what managers do regarding cultural intelligence and the respondents were carefully selected, based on clear criteria. The study did not aim to explore the perceptions of the international employees, however it might be the case that managers experience the cultural intelligence differently than the international employees themselves. Therefore, it would be interesting for future research to interview international employees to expand the cultural intelligence literature. Lastly, this study focused on the faculties of the university since the intention was to learn from the primary internationalization process, which takes places within the faculties. The results show that the need for internationalization development is bigger in support staff than in the faculties, and therefore it could be interesting for future research to explore the internationalization process regarding cultural intelligence in support staff in higher education institutions as well.

## 5.3 Theoretical Implications

First and foremost, the present study meets the need for an expansion of the theory about cultural intelligence in higher education institutions. This study provided insights into what the construct of cultural intelligence means in higher education institutions. The study revealed some techniques that managers of international teams use to generate cultural intelligence within the team, but a more interesting insight is the fact that cultural intelligence functions as a condition to work in higher education institutions. Managers select for cultural intelligence by ensuring that the employees they hire are used to working in international work environments and possess the personality traits that managers consider important to adapt to new cultural contexts. After the selection

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however, managers become more lenient in managing cultural intelligence. Working in higher education institutions is associated with adapting to other cultures. Scientists and professors work with colleagues and students from all over the world, visit conferences and travel frequently. This already demonstrates that candidates without cultural intelligence are not suited for the jobs. Employees in teams at higher education institutions are ambitious and highly educated scientists, who belong to the most privileged in their own country and are used to working in the international field of science. Those employees understand and accept that people differ and they consider adapting to different cultural contexts a natural process. This is unlike previous studies into cultural intelligence that were conducted in various other sectors and organizations, and this is why the present study in higher education institutions adds a new dimension to the literature about cultural intelligence.

Furthermore, the results of this study have implications for the cultural intelligence construct. Previous research mainly considered cultural intelligence to be a construct consisting of four dimensions: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational and behavioral (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). The current study, however, indicates that there is an overlap between the cognitive and the metacognitive dimension in the context of higher education institutions. Understanding the idea of culture and using that knowledge to understand the cultural context and critically reflect on one's thinking processes are related in higher education institutions. Employees who understand the idea of culture and who understand the differences between cultures seem to automatically use that knowledge to understand and accept the specific context. The two dimensions are related in such a degree that they could be merged into one single dimension.

The construct of cultural intelligence as a whole appears not to be applicable in every context equally. In the context of higher education institutions, some dimensions and subdimensions play a significant role, where others seem to be of minor interest. The (meta)cognitive dimension is clearly present in higher education institutions, since internationalization is naturally connected to the work and cognitive cultural intelligence functions as a selection criterion. Employees are, maybe unintentionally, aware of how someone's culture influences the interaction and know how to adjust their behavior when the interaction is not effective. This seems to be a natural process and employees do not

explicitly develop action plans before interacting with people from other cultures. Therefore, the subdimension 'planning' that Van Dyne, Ang, Ng, Rockstuhl, Tan and Koh (2012) distinguished does not play an explicit role in the context of cultural intelligence in higher education institutions.

The motivational dimension of cultural intelligence seems to be automatically related to jobs in higher education institutions, where most employees have never worked in teams that were not international and consider working in an international team a natural thing. Employees value the diversity because they enjoy the collaboration, are confident the interaction will be successful and see the diversity as beneficial. However, working in an international team encouraged by an external motivator such as status does not seem to play any role here. Intrinsic motivation thus plays an important role in cultural intelligence in the context of higher education institutions, where extrinsic motivation does not seem to be of interest. Lastly, the behavioral dimension is meaningful in higher education institutions. All employees are highly educated and ambitious scientists with the same research goals, and therefore the content of the communication does not specifically differ. Nevertheless, the associated attitude does. Employees differ in the way they voice their opinion and in how they resolve disagreements, and thus the focus here lies especially on the directness and power of communication between two individuals with different cultural backgrounds.

## 5.4  Practical Implications and Recommendations

### 5.4.1  General Practical Implications

First, this study aimed to understand which techniques managers of international teams in higher education institutions use to help international employees adapt to a new cultural context. Managers in higher education institutions are advised to select for cultural intelligence when hiring new employees in order to maintain or enhance the cultural intelligence in their teams. They should focus on candidates who are already used to international work environments, who are able to express themselves clearly and possess personality traits that are helpful in the adaptation, such as openness, robustness, independence and social skills. Furthermore, managers can help their employees adapt to new cultural contexts by means of several techniques. They can develop cultural knowledge by assigning buddies and providing instruction manuals, stimulate motivation by facilitating social events and training the right behavior by taking the time to explain

employees how they are expected to behave in specific contexts. Lastly, role-modeling by the manager functions as an effective technique as well. When team managers are culturally intelligent themselves, it will make them aware of the challenges associated with working in an international team and help them understand and deal with those challenges.

### 5.4.2 Recommendations for the Participating Organization

In addition to the theoretical implications, this study represents practical recommendations as well. The study was carried out at the University of Twente, where the techniques that managers of international teams use to generate cultural intelligence were explored. Managers already apply a number of techniques and the literature offers more techniques that managers could apply, but the question remains whether that is really necessary. It seems that the emphasis in this case should lie more on the support of HR in the internationalization process. HR currently does not seem to play a significant role in the internationalization strategy or the management of international employees, while some managers explicitly say they would like support in the internationalization process. HR does not profile their department as a professional body with a great amount of expertise and is thus not considered as such. Managers fulfill their responsibilities themselves, in their own ways, and do not turn to HR for support in the internationalization process, since they do not experience how beneficial HR can be. However, HR could be an essential partner in the internationalization process, since employee behavior is crucial for organizational success and HR departments in international organizations should focus on managing diverse human resources (Benschop, 2001; Friedman, 2007).

A number of recommendations on how the HR department can support managers of international teams in the internationalization process were drafted. The recommendations do not only focus on the role of HR to support managers in generating cultural intelligence, but extend to the whole internationalization process.

*Recommendation 1: Support Managers in Increasing Cultural Intelligence*

One of HR's most important tasks in international organizations is taking care of the personal and professional development of employees (Friedman, 2007). HR should support managers of international teams in enhancing the cultural intelligence of their

employees. The focus here lies not on the development of new techniques, but on relieving managers of international teams by centralizing some of the techniques that managers use to increase the cultural intelligence of their employees. Some techniques, such as the introduction manual, are related to specific teams in such a degree that it is more efficient when the team manager implements them, but for most techniques HR could take responsibility. The HR department can apply its professional expertise to develop the techniques. A number of training packages are identified, which HR can use to relieve managers of international teams and help them increase the cultural intelligence of their employees.

1.1 **Language Courses:** HR could support managers by facilitating and promoting language courses. International employees may benefit from English courses to communicate better and courses for the local language are helpful for the integration within the country. HR could monitor which employees need language courses and facilitate and promote the courses.

1.2 **Intercultural Courses:** HR can support managers by facilitating and promoting intercultural training for employees. The current available intercultural training only focuses on management, but managers consider such training as helpful for employees as well, to increase their (meta)cognitive and behavioral cultural intelligence.

1.3 **Hierarchy in different cultures:** New international employees often show a different attitude towards people from hierarchically higher levels than local employees do. It is important for new employees to be aware of the differences in hierarchy between cultures and to know how to appropriately behave in different settings. In the current situation, managers spend a lot of time explaining to their new employees which behavior is appropriate in the local culture, but HR could unburden the managers and increase the behavioral cultural intelligence of new international employees by facilitating training on this subject for each international employee.

1.4 **Increasing social interaction by promoting associations:** HR should take responsibility for increasing social interaction by promoting associations where people who have the same interest or job come together. Participating in an association and finding social connection in the local community is helpful to increase the motivational cultural intelligence of international employees. In the

current situation, some managers did not know about the existence of some associations, and therefore could not encourage their employees to become members. HR can take responsibility for this and inform new employees about the different associations at the university and recommend them to become a member.

*Recommendation 2: Support Managers in Practical Matters*

When looking at the internationalization process in general, there are additional topics where HR could play a role in order to unburden managers. Managers consider administrative policies regarding visa and housing an administrative burden and argue that they and their international employees need more support and information. A possibility would be to appoint a central contact point that managers and international employees can consult for questions regarding these practical matters. Furthermore, when hiring new international employees, managers face difficulties in comparing grades and courses from universities outside of Europe. Therefore, HR could help managers simplify and improve the selection process of international employees by, for example, setting up a list with courses and grades with ratings from different universities worldwide.

*Recommendation 3: Ensure Effective Communication*

An important task of HR in international organizations is to ensure effective communication across cultures and languages (Friedman, 2007). In the current situation the support staff, which includes the HR department, often communicates in the local language. This does not benefit the internationalization process and therefore it is advised that HR creates a communication policy which incorporates that all communication between the support staff and the faculties is consistently in English.

*Recommendation 4: Internal Marketing Campaign*

In the current situation, managers of international teams do not find the way to HR and some of them do not even understand why HR would interfere in the internationalization process. This can be explained by the fact that, over the years, managers have learned to deal with internationalization themselves and therefore are not even aware what professional support they miss from HR. The HR department is considered as support for administrative and labor contract-related tasks, not as a professional body with great expertise. In order to play a critical role in the internationalization and cultural

intelligence process, HR needs to be considered a strong partner. Therefore, HR is advised to invest in an internal marketing campaign in order to encourage managers of international teams and international employees to find the way to HR. This campaign needs to communicate that HR aims to be a professional player in the internationalization process and should demonstrate how the HR department can be of added value. Furthermore, since some managers seem to doubt the financial benefits of internationalization, it is important that HR clearly communicates the internationalization goals of the university, the benefits of internationalization and the supportive role of the HR department in the process. Moreover, it is helpful when HR is physically visible in the workplace. Both managers and international employees themselves will be better able to find the way to HR when they interact regularly. One of the faculties currently works with an HR employee who comes over to the department twice a week to support international employees and managers with practical matters such as housing, visa and filling out forms. This is highly appreciated and a helpful marketing tool to establish HR as an essential partner in the internationalization process.

# 6 Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the techniques that managers of international teams in higher education institutions use to help international employees adapt to a new cultural context. The study showed that employees perceive internationalization as a natural phenomenon and are used to international environments. A number of techniques that managers use to generate cultural intelligence were identified. First of all, they select for cognitive cultural intelligence by making sure the candidates they hire know what it means to work in another country with people from different cultures and possess the personality traits that managers consider necessary to adapt to new cultural contexts. Furthermore, they assign new international employees a buddy on their first working day and offer them introduction manuals. Subsequently, managers stimulate cultural interaction by organizing and facilitating social events. Lastly, managers spend time explaining to international employees which behaviors are appropriate in the specific cultural context.

This research also aimed to look for ways in which HR can support managers of international teams in the internationalization process. First of all, HR needs to unburden managers of international teams by taking responsibility for language courses and intercultural courses. Furthermore, HR should support managers and international employees in practical matters such as housing and visa. Moreover, HR needs to ensure effective communication and last but not least, HR should invest in an internal marketing campaign which encourages managers and international employees to come to HR for support in the internationalization process. The outcomes of this study will create a greater awareness of HR and their role in the internationalization process. The results will also help HR to strengthen their position as a department that adds value to the international environment of a higher education institution.

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# Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. What is your educational background?
2. What is your professional background?
3. What is your international experience?
4. How would you describe your team? (Number of employees, composition, nationalities)
5. To what extent do people collaborate within your team? (Difference between education/research, staff and PhD's)
6. What is your role in the team?
7. You supervise a group of international people. How do you experience your role as leader of such an international team?
8. Could you try to describe your leadership style?
9. What are focus points in the selection process when hiring new employees? Which role does culture play here?
10. Which role does culture play in the onboarding process?
11. Which factors do you take into account to make sure a new international colleague functions optimally? (Room division, job descriptions, praying facilities etc.)
12. What are focus points during the year reviews?
13. How do you take the culture of the employee into account when preparing and conducting year reviews? (Different questions, different focus areas).
14. How do you take culture into account during meetings?
15. Based on which choices do you create sub teams within your team? Which role does culture play here?
16. Which role does culture play in the collaboration between the members of your team?
17. Which difficulties regarding cultural differences do you experience in the collaboration between team members? How do you deal with this?
18. How do you stimulate intercultural interaction within your team?
19. What do you need to effectively stimulate intercultural interaction within your team? (Advice, support, facilitiations)

20. Which role could HR play in stimulating/enhancing intercultural interaction? Why?

21. Are there any other things you would like to add about the collaboration between members of your international team?

22. What are, in your opinion, points of attention regarding internationalization?

23. Do you have any further comments?