

DECLARATION

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication.

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I confirm that:

- This thesis represents my own work;
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Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

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Impact of directness on the perception of trust in intercultural communication in business relationships

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This thesis is supervised by

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ABSTRACT

This research project examines the impact of a direct communication style on the establishment of trust in intercultural business settings. A qualitative research approach was chosen as it was the aim of this research project to capture and evaluate participants' perceptions of directness and its impact on trustworthiness, owing to underlying cultural values and beliefs of participants.

The focus group method was chosen as a stand-alone method to collect rich and in-depth data. The group effect of the focus group method was significant for this research project as cultural differences were under examination. A critical incident approach was employed, and three different scenarios were discussed in each focus group. The three focus groups were culturally specific, and findings were compared across the focus group to identify culturally specific perceptions and patterns. Cultures under examination were the German and Chinese cultures, with New Zealand as a control group.

Findings disclose an unexpected preference for a direct communication style in business settings from the Chinese participants, and hence, strongly support the call for more empirical research in this area. A variety of culturally specific factors were identified to impact participants' willingness to trust another party, and findings indicate that the elements of directness and indirectness impact participants' perceptions of another person's trustworthiness.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COL	Collectivism
DVD	Digital Video Disc
HC	High-context
HT	High-trust
IND	Individualism
LC	Low-context
LT	Low-trust
LTO	Long-Term Orientation
PDI	Power Distance Index
U.S.	United States
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Communication, be it on an interpersonal or organizational level, is often discussed as the key to success, but also as the most common reason for failure (Thomas & Inkson, 2009). When speaking of trust, communication is a key variable for successful relationships. Successful communication across cultures, however, becomes even more complex and differences in cultural values and beliefs complicate the development of trust in international relationships (Harris & Dibben, 1999).

Harris and Dibben (1999) make the critique that "... the development and impact of interpersonal trust in international business remains comparatively understudied" (p. 464). The matter of how trust develops and what elements are seen as crucial has only been minimally researched yet (McAllister, 1995). Since interpersonal trust in international business automatically includes intercultural communication, this study aims to follow up on the call for more empirical, qualitative research in this area.

Rationale and purpose

The focus of this research project lies on the investigation of the relationship between directness and perceived trustworthiness in intercultural business settings. The twofold aim of this study is firstly, to investigate how directness is perceived by participants from diverse cultures, and secondly, investigate how and why differences in participants' perceptions of directness influence the development of trust in intercultural business relationships. The identification of key elements and concepts of direct communication as decisive factors influencing a person's perception of trustworthiness are central to this research project.

The purpose of this research project is to further enhance understanding of the diversity of people's perceptions of directness in intercultural communication, and to provide a fuller and richer picture of the complex relationship between directness and the development of trust. The outcome is in the form of indications about the relationship between directness and trust, as well as indications for recommendations on how to improve intercultural communication in order to avoid miscommunication and facilitate the establishment of trust in international business relationships.

Since researchers have asserted that “[i]nterpretations of other persons’ communicative behaviors and attributions of trustworthiness are influenced by culture-based habits and assumptions” (Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000, p. 349), this research project aims to investigate the impact of directness, as a specific element of communication, on the establishment of trust in intercultural business settings. Although much has already been written on the topic of intercultural communication and on trust in organizational settings, a review of the literature clearly reveals a need for more empirical research; for qualitative studies in particular. Likewise, little research has been conducted in the area of trust in international/intercultural settings. Since the majority of existing studies compare United States of America (USA) and Japan (Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000; Tanaka & Bell, 1996; Sullivan & Peterson, 1982), this research project focuses on less researched countries. Moreover, the majority of studies examine intercultural communication from a quantitative perspective, thus, failing to capture the whole complexity of the topic (Yoshitake, 2004). Due to the desired outcome of this study, and to follow the call for more empirical qualitative research in this area, a qualitative approach was chosen for this research project.

The research question is:

How does directness in intercultural communication affect the perception of trust among individuals with different cultural profiles?

Sub-questions are:

How is a direct communication style interpreted by culturally diverse individuals?

What specific elements and concepts influence participants’ perceptions of another person’s trustworthiness?

Operational definitions

Intercultural communication in this research project is broadly defined as a “... symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 39). Highlighting a phenomenological view, intercultural communication “... can best be understood as cultural diversity in the perception of social objects and events” (Porter & Samovar, 1997, p. 20).

As this research project focuses on the perception of directness as an element of intercultural communication, the term ‘perception’ in this research project is

defined as an “... internal process by which we select, evaluate, and organize stimuli from the external environment” and “... construct our unique social realities by attributing meaning to the social objects and events we encounter ...” (Porter & Samovar, 1997, p. 15). Since culture conditions and structures these perception by determining what are, consciously or unconsciously, perceived as important stimuli, this research project aims to shed light on people’s perceptions of directness in order to facilitate the establishment of trusting relationships between members from different cultures.

Although the importance of trust is widely recognized throughout the literature, a common definition is rather difficult to find (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998; Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000). Trust in this research project, therefore, is conceptualized as a cognitive and behavioral process (Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000), and is defined as “... a person’s degree of confidence in the words and actions of another” (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies, 1998).

Taking into account that trust is a cognitive process, the close link to culture becomes apparent since culture operates at a very deep and unconscious level, influencing people’s perceptions and constructs of social reality. Nishishiba and Ritchie (2000) highlight that “[i]t is likely that individual concepts of trustworthiness are at least partly shaped by the generalized concepts of communication and relationship that are specific to each culture” (p. 349).

Since openness, as an element of directness, significantly impacts the development of trust (Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000), it caught the interest of the researcher whether a direct communication style would also impact the establishment of trust across cultures. According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), a direct communication style refers to “... the extent speakers reveal their intentions through explicit verbal communication” (p. 100). The authors determine a direct verbal communication style as “... verbal messages that embody and invoke speakers’ true intentions in terms of their wants, needs, and desires in the discourse process” (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 100). Taking a closer look at dictionary based definitions, directness can be defined as communicating straightforward, straight to the point, and frank (Shorter Oxford English dictionary, 2007; The Random House dictionary of English language, 1987; The new Oxford dictionary of English, 1998), as well as not ambiguous, exact, and complete, “... esp. where contrast is implied” (The Oxford Encyclopedic English dictionary, 1991, p. 407). Therefore, directness or

direct communication, in this research project is referred to as straightforward, open, and explicit verbal communication.

This definition is in close relation to Hall's (1977) definition of a low-context (LC) communication culture. Hall (1977) points out that low-context communication cultures vest the mass of the information of a message in the explicit code, whereas in high-context (HC) communication cultures, on the contrary, "... most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message" (p. 91).

Directness has been chosen as the independent variable of this research project since little empirical research has been conducted in this area and contradicting views can be found in the literature (Cardon, 2008; Beamer, 2003; Kim, Pan & Park, 1998). Since differences in the preferences for communication styles influence the perceptions of another person's trustworthiness across cultures, researching the impact of directness on the perception of trust will facilitate reducing intercultural miscommunication, leading to more successful international business relationships.

Personal interest of the researcher

The researcher is driven by personal interest in the topic of intercultural management, and intercultural communication in particular. With a background in international management, including international human resource management and intercultural management, the researcher is particularly interested in business communication across cultures. The idea of researching the impact of directness on the establishment of trust was developed due to the researcher's preference for a direct communication style. Since directness, although appreciated by a variety of cultures, can result in misunderstandings and even worse be perceived as impolite and damage relationships by violating *face*-concerns, researching the impact on trust can be considered highly important and interesting.

Research framework

This research project is explorative in nature, as the focus lies on gaining a deeper understanding of people's underlying perceptions and beliefs. The units of analysis of this research project are individuals and their culturally determined perceptions in particular. Although this research project recognizes that individual preferences differ from person to person within one common culture, it can be argued

that people from one common culture share culturally determined typical communication preferences, since their underlying values, attitudes, and norms are culturally influenced (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Triandis, 1995).

The focus group interview was used as a stand-alone data collection method for this research project (Bryman, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), with each focus group composed of participants with a common cultural background. The focus group method is applied in order to capture data about why and how people feel the way they do (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003; Reinard, 1998), which is the desired data for this research project. Data was collected in the form of culturally specific thoughts, perceptions, experiences, attitudes and beliefs of participants.

The critical incident technique was utilized as the data collection tool to gather culture specific data in the focus groups (McAllister, Whiteford, Hill, Thomas & Fitzgerald, 2006). Given the complexity of the topic under study, and the nature of the desired outcome, a qualitative approach was indicated. Collected data was compared across the three cultures examined in this study and discussed in the context of the relevant literature. Before the actual focus groups took place, a pilot was conducted in order to test and assure the suitability of the chosen critical incidents, and the intended questions. The participants were postgraduate and undergraduate students from business related areas to allow for a common base of understanding of business practices.

Since reliability is often discussed as an issue in qualitative research (Bryman, 2008), this study offers a valuable means of collecting qualitative data in the field of intercultural communication, where social settings and context are seen as crucial. Utilizing scenarios, therefore, allows for taking contextual factors in situational descriptions into account (Martinez Flor, 2004; McAllister et al., 2006). This is seen as crucial in the field of intercultural communication research, as well as for the assessment of trust, and hence, is essential for this study.

The three cultures examined in this research project are the German, Chinese and New Zealand cultures, owing to their cultural characteristics relevant for this study. The German and Chinese cultures were selected since the two cultures are considered to differ significantly in their cultural dimensions of high-and low-context communication (Hall, 1977), and individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1984), according to the literature. China was chosen as an example of a rather high-context and collectivistic culture, discussed in the literature as having a preference for an

indirect, implicit communication style. Germany, on the contrary, was chosen as an example of a rather low-context and individualistic culture, with a preference for direct and explicit communication. Due to the cultural profiles of the two countries, it was considered likely that German and Chinese participants might prefer different degrees of directness in their communication.

New Zealand was chosen as a contrast group, as it was considered likely that New Zealand participants may result in a placing between the Germans and Chinese in terms of preference for direct communication. Since New Zealand is considered to be a highly individual country, according to Hofstede (2001), it was considered likely that New Zealand participants prefer a low-context, rather direct communication style.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis is composed of six chapters. This chapter introduces relevant concepts, provides an overview of the rationale and purpose, and outlines the methodology of this study. Chapter two presents a review of the current literature on intercultural communication and trust, and identifies gaps in the current literature. Chapter three provides an overview of the methodological approach and the research design of this study, with a particular emphasis on the use of focus groups as a stand-alone data collection method, and the utilization of critical incidents for this study. Chapter four presents the research findings from the three focus groups, followed by a first level analysis. Chapter five analyses and discusses the research findings in the context of the relevant literature. The thesis ends with conclusions and suggestions for future research in chapter six.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter reviews the relevant literature for this research project. The first part introduces the topics of intercultural communication and trust, including allied themes and concepts. This is followed by an examination of culturally determined preferences for a direct or indirect communication style, according to the relevant literature. Afterwards, an overview of the current literature on closely linked and interconnected concepts is provided.

Culture and communication

For a better understanding of the topic, the terms culture and inter- or cross-cultural communication will be defined at the start.¹ Defining culture as well as intercultural communication is difficult, since they are very broad and all-encompassing concepts, and many definitions exist in the literature, depending from which point of view it is examined (Porter & Samovar, 2000; Gudykunst & Lee, 2003).

When writing about culture or cross-cultural behavior and communication, generalizations will be made and sometimes stereotypes will be used to explain certain events or situations. Although not all people of one nation or one culture are alike and behavior varies even within one culture, literature agrees that generalizations are helpful for explanations, as a majority of people from one culture share certain cultural characteristics (Hofstede, 1984; Varner, 2000). These generalizations, however, are not meant to reinforce those stereotypes.

For the purpose of this thesis culture will be defined broadly as "... a shared system of meanings" (Trompenaars, 1994, p. 14), with shared beliefs, values, and norms. Porter and Samovar (1997) point out that "[c]ulture enables us to make sense of our surroundings ..." (p. 12), since values, beliefs, norms, and behavior that is learned and shared throughout childhood are influenced by culture (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Consequently, communication patterns and the sharing of meaning is easily possible within one common culture because people share the same cultural values, manners, and beliefs. However, since cultures differ from one another,

¹ Although some authors differentiate between the terms intercultural and cross-cultural communication, this paper will not make a distinction but use the terms interchangeably, since the differentiation is marginal and different points of view exist in the literature (Limaye & Victor, 1991).

it is widely agreed in the literature that the way people perceive the world and the way they communicate differs as well (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Kim, 2002; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Hall, 1977). Misunderstandings occur not only because of language problems and different communication styles across cultures, but also due to different value-orientations (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005).

Communication can be seen as "... the exchange of information, be it words, ideas, or emotions" (Trompenaars, 1994, p. 74.), with attached meanings. Porter and Samovar (1997) point out that "... communication is a form of human behaviour ..." and "our behaviours become messages to which other people may respond" (p. 9). This includes verbal as well as non-verbal communication, regardless of whether it happens consciously or unconsciously. Geert Hofstede, for instance, defines culture as "collective programming of the mind" (1984, p. 13), which highlights the deeply rooted unconscious level of culture. Communication across cultures, hence, is even more complex, as sender and receiver of messages de- and encode them differently. Consequently, the 'correct' interpretation and understanding of the meaning attached to the message is even more difficult.

Intercultural communication

Since communication is culture specific, scholars agree that communication styles also vary across culture (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim & Heyman, 1996; Hall, 1977; Kim, 2002). Intercultural communication takes place every time people from different cultures come together, whether verbal or nonverbal, conscious or unconscious, messages get exchanged via cultural values, habits, norms, and beliefs, and quite frequently miscommunication and misunderstandings arise. Whereas the sharing of meaning is easily possible within one common culture, as people share the same communication patterns due to similar cultural values and beliefs, complexity increases in cross-cultural settings, as the way individuals perceive the world and the way they communicate differs. Edward T. Hall looks at culture from the point of view of communication and maintains that "culture is communication and communication is culture" (1959, p. 169, as cited in Gudykunst & Lee, 2003, p. 8). The interchangeable use of the terms communication and culture can be found throughout communication writing (Hall, 1977; Porter & Samovar, 1997,

2000; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005) and indicates the strong relationship between the two terms as well as the variety in existing communication styles. As a result, Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) define intercultural communication as “the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation” (p. 39), and according to Porter and Samovar (1997), intercultural communication “... can best be understood as cultural diversity in the perception of social objects and events” (p. 20).

Dimensions of culture

Differences in preferred communication styles can best be explained on the basis of cross-cultural concepts such as high-context (HC) and low-context (LC) communication cultures (Hall, 1977), as well as individualism (IND) and collectivism (COL) (Hofstede, 1984; Triandis, 1995). According to Hall (1977), the meaning of a message in low-context cultures is almost entirely entrusted to words, and the context is not assumed to be understood. In high-context cultures, on the other hand, most of the meaning of a message is embedded in the person or in the context (Hall, 1977; Gudykunst et al., 1996). Most scholars, however, use the dimension of individualism-collectivism (IND-COL) to explain cultural differences in communication processes (Ogawa, Gudykunst & Nishida, 2004; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Triandis, 1995; Hofstede, 1984). According to several authors, individualism-collectivism can be seen as the major dimension of cultural variability to explain differences and similarities in behavior across cultures (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Individualism, in short, can be explained as valuing individual identity, individual goals, and rights over group identity, and group obligations (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Collectivism, on the contrary, refers to the tendency of people to emphasize group identity over individual identity, and focus on group cohesion and consensus (Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2003).² Researchers, moreover, found that low-context communication tends to predominate in individualistic cultures, whereas high-context communication tends to predominate in collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst et al., 1996³; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Thomas, 2008). All aspects of

² For further discussion of these concepts refer to Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001), Hofstede (1984), Gudykunst et al. (1996), Trompenaars and Woolliams (2003), or/and Triandis (1995).

³ According to Richardson and Smith (2007) the study by Gudykunst et al. (1996) was the first empirical confirmation that U.S. Americans, as a rather individualistic culture, predominately use low-context communication, whereas Japanese, as members of a rather collectivistic culture, predominately use high-context communication.

individualism-collectivism and high- or low-context communication exist in all cultures, but one tends to predominate (Hall, 1977; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Cultures, hence, can be placed along a continuum for individualism-collectivism, and a preference for high- and low-context communication in regard to their values, and a predominance of high- or low-context communication amongst members of a common culture (Hall, 1977; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Cardon, 2008; Ting-Toomey, 1988). Gudykunst et al. (1996), point out that “[c]ultural individualism-collectivism (I-C) has a direct effect on communication because it affects the norms and rules that guide behavior in individualistic and collectivistic cultures” (p. 511). Norms, rules, values, and beliefs (culture) dictate what is seen as appropriate behavior and appropriate and efficient communication. Therefore, different communication styles or strategies can be identified across cultures.

Criticism of theoretical concepts

It needs to be mentioned that Hall’s (1977) concept of low-context and high-context cultures, as well as Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions are not free of criticism (Cardon, 2008; Fang, 2003; Signorini, Wiesemes & Murphy, 2009). However, scholars value Hall’s model as a crucial source for understanding and explaining culturally different communication styles (Cardon, 2008; Fang, 2003; Limaye & Victor, 1991; Kim, 2010; Ting-Toomey, 1988), and according to Fang (2003), Hofstede’s work “... is the most influential work to date in the study of cross cultural management” (p. 347). Cardon (2008), likewise, points out that Hall’s model “... is one of the dominant theoretical frameworks for interpreting intercultural communication” (p. 399).

The strongest criticism of Hall’s (1977) research is in regard to the validity of the contexting model due to the method of data collection in the form of ethnographic observations (Singelis & Brown, 1995), and the lack of empirical testing of the model. The need for more empirical research on Hall’s (1977) contexting model, therefore, is stressed throughout the literature (Cardon, 2008; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Limaye & Victor, 1991; Kim, 2010). Kim (2010), however, notes that Hall’s focus was not on research and theory development, but rather on practical and applied intercultural training issues. Limitations on Hofstede’s (2001) framework are mainly based on the oversimplification of cultural differences, the inconsistency between the categories,

the treatment of culture as static, and the viability of his fifth dimension long-term orientation (Signorini, Wiesemes & Murphy, 2009; Fang, 2003).

Trust

The topic of trust can be found in business writing on organizational behavior and leadership, as well as in literature on interpersonal communication (Robbins, 2005; McAllister, 1995; Bjerke, 1999; Werbel & Henriques, 2009; Connerley & Pedersen, 2005; Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000; Hargie & Dickson, 2003; Lewis, 2006). In the majority of cases though, trust is defined from a Western perspective, not taking culturally determined differences into account. However, whether in an interpersonal or organizational context, scholars agree that trust provides a crucial foundation for effective communication and successful business relationships (Werbel & Henriques, 2009; Dikken, 2000; Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000; McAllister, 1995).

Although trust is difficult to define due its complex nature, a variety of scholars commonly refer to trust as a cognitive notion involving individual values, expectations, perceptions, as well as the individual's willingness to trust others (Robbins, 2005; Harris & Dikken, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Greenberg & Baron, 2008; Liu & Wang, 2010; Msanjila & Afsarmanesh, 2008; Bhattacharya, Devinney & Pillutla, 1998). A vast variety of different definitions of trust can be found throughout the literature, depending on the discipline examining the concept (Bhattacharya et al., 1998). Robbins (2005) defines trust as "... a positive expectation that another will not – through words, actions, or decisions – act opportunistically" (p. 171). Greenberg and Baron (2008) highlight the concept of *psychological contracts* which exist in beliefs and perceptions of individuals and refer to people's expectations about another person. Scholars emphasize the importance of values when assessing whether or not another person is perceived trustworthy, and Tschannen-Moran (2004) points out that "[p]eople make trust judgments in part of the basis of the assumption of shared values. Values are general standards or principles that are considered intrinsically desirable ends..." (p. 49), and vary across cultures (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Harris & Dikken, 1999).

Literature on intercultural communication emphasizes that values, beliefs, and norms are determined by culture, since they are learned and shared throughout childhood (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Since culture operates at a very deep and unconscious level, sharing of meaning and 'correct' interpretation of

communication incidents can become quite complex, hence, difficult across cultures. Since values and beliefs are culturally determined, the perception and interpretation of (culturally determined) different behavior can easily lead to misinterpretations and misunderstandings (House, 2006). Developing trust, therefore, is even more difficult across cultures, owing to a higher uncertainty about cultural values and norms of others (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Since the development of trusting relationships depends on people's expectations and perceptions, Lewicki et al. (1998) point out that knowledge about other cultures becomes crucial in order to properly interpret messages and predict behavior accurately.

Consequently, a growing body of literature discusses the importance of cultural awareness and knowledge in order to minimize or avoid intercultural misunderstandings (Irving, 2010; Thomas & Inkson, 2009; Arasaratnam, 2006 and 2009; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Early & Gardner, 2005; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Liu & Lee, 2008; Thomas, Elron, Stahl, Ekelund, Ravlin, Cerdin, Poelmans, Brislin, Pekerti, Aycan, Maznevski, Au & Lazarova, 2008). Concepts such as *intercultural communication competence* (ICC), *intercultural competence* (IC), and *cultural intelligence* (CQ) represent important theories in the Western management literature and are seen as essential for successful managing international, and hence, cross-cultural business relationships.

Categories and layers and dimensions of trust

Several scholars differentiate three layers of trust, namely basic trust (or dispositional trust), general trust (or learnt trust), and situational trust (Harris & Dibben, 1999; Dibben, 2000). Basic trust refers to an individual's personality trait to be trusting or not; learnt trust refers to an individual's general tendency to trust others, based on previous experiences; and situational trust depends on situational cues (Dibben, 2000). Cultural differences in the perception of another person's trustworthiness come into play on the level of learnt trust and situational trust, as past experiences are influenced by culture, hence, individual's perceptions of what or who is perceived as trustworthy is influenced by the individual's cultural background, and the culturally determined process of socialization. Nishishiba and Ritchie (2000) lend support to this by stating that different cultures have diverse concepts of trust and trustworthiness. Since members from different cultures take different concepts of trustworthiness for granted, it can be argued that culturally diverse individuals also

assess other individuals' trustworthiness from their own point of reference, which in turn can lead to misjudgments due to incorrect interpretations across cultures (Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000; Lewis, 2006).⁴ It is, moreover, argued that "... individual concepts of trustworthiness are at least partly shaped by the generalized concepts of communication and relationship that are specific to each culture" (p. 349), and "[i]nterpretations of other persons' communicative behaviors and attributions of trustworthiness are influenced by culture-based habits and assumptions" (Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000, p. 349). Moreover, Thomas, Zolin, and Hartman (2009) highlight that "[t]he relationship between communication and trust is context related and interconnected, which makes it difficult to tease apart" (p. 306). Although the relationship between culture, communication, and trust is recognized throughout the literature, there is comparatively little specific research in this area to date. Since the importance of awareness and knowledge about culturally different cognitive concepts of communication and trust is emphasized in the literature, additional research to investigate and enhance the understanding of the relationship between the variables can be seen as crucial to facilitate successful cross-cultural relationships by deepening understanding of cultural differences.

Greenberg (2011) differentiates three distinct kinds of trust, namely *calculus-based trust*, *identification-based trust*, and *swift trust*, and according to Harris and Dibben (1999), *calculus-* and *identification-based trust* can be defined as categories of situational trust. *Calculus-based trust* is a form of trust based on threat and deterrence, and is common in many business relationships; ones based on transactional contracts in particular (Greenberg, 2011; Rousseau, et al., 1998; Bhattacharya et al., 1998). Greenberg and Baron (2008) clarify that "[c]alculus-based trust exists whenever people believe that another person will behave as promised out of fear of getting punished for doing otherwise" (p. 429 f.). Moreover, *calculus-based trust* is based on rational choice an economic consideration of cost and benefits of specific behavior (Rousseau et al., 1998; Bhattacharya et al., 1998). *Identification-based trust* is grounded in the power of personal relations and is based on "... accepting and understanding another person's wants and desires" (Greenberg, 2011, p. 380). According to Greenberg (2011), *identification-based trust* involves several important factors, namely familiarity, which refers to knowledge based on relationships; shared

⁴ According to Brislin (1993), making judgements about culturally diverse others from one's own point of reference is referred to as ethnocentrism.

experience; reciprocal disclosure, which refers to the sharing of information in order to strengthen personal relationships; fulfilled promises; and demonstration of nonexploitation and vulnerability based on past events. As opposed to the two aforementioned kinds of trust, *swift trust* “... incorporates both transactional and interpersonal considerations but occurs only in short-term relationships (e.g., virtual teams)” (Greenberg, 2011, p. 380). The three different kinds of trust can be categorized in regard to the timeframe of the relationship, as well as in regard to the focus on transactional or interpersonal factors. The following figure summarizes the three different kinds:

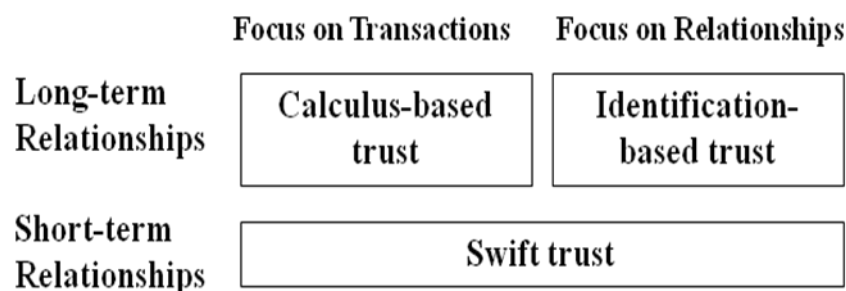


Figure 1: Kinds of trust (Greenberg, 2011, p. 381)

Taking a closer look at the definition of *identification-based trust*, it becomes apparent that culture has a strong impact, since culturally determined values, norms, and beliefs influence individuals' wants and desires. In addition to an individual's personality, culture and culturally determined behaviors and beliefs impact the establishment of relationships, and hence, the establishment of identification-based trust. Since Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) define a direct communication mode as a communication style revealing true intentions, wants, needs, and desires of individuals, a critical link can be drawn between the applied communication style and the establishment of trust.

Lewis (2006) divides societies into high- and low-trust categories (Lewis, 2006; Fukuyama, 1995). Whereas members of high-trust (HT) cultures are seen to trust other people until they prove untrustworthy, members of low-trust (LT) cultures, on the other hand, are seen as initially suspicious (Lewis, 2006). According to Lewis (2006), Chinese can be generally classified as members of a rather low-trust culture, whereas Germans are seen as members of a rather high-trust culture. The concept of high- and low-trust cultures has not been applied much in previous research though, and further empirical research is needed. The concept, however, might be useful for

explaining culturally determined differences in the perception of timeframes for establishing trusting relationships. Taking into consideration that Chinese are thought to be initially suspicious of strangers could explain their desire to establish good social relationships before starting a serious business relationship. Germans' rather trusting attitude towards strangers, on the contrary, explains why they require a shorter period of time to establish a business relationship, which start with signing a contract (Lewis, 2006; Bjerke, 1999). Lewis (2006), in addition, points out that Germans do not easily start relationships of friendships with strangers, and are not particularly interested in social relationships with their business partners. Once established though, social as well as business relationships with Germans are considered to be long lasting (Lewis, 2006).

Elements influencing the establishment of trust

It is widely agreed in the literature that integrity, openness, vulnerability, risk, and the willingness to trust people are key dimensions of trust (Robbins, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Werbel & Henriques, 2009; Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000; Dibben, 2000; Bhattacharya et al., 1998). Integrity, according to Robbins (2005), refers to honesty and truthfulness and "... seems to be most critical when someone **assesses** another's trustworthiness" (p. 171). Openness and honesty are closely linked concepts considered from a Western perspective; however, these concepts may vary enormously in other cultures. Whereas honesty represents a key value in Asian cultures, openness and absolute truth are not perceived in the same way (Bjerke, 1999; Lewis, 2006).

Hofstede (2001), in this regard, highlights the importance to differentiate culturally diverse perception of the concept of truth, or absolute truth. Whereas the conception of 'absolute truth' is significant for members of Western countries, it does not exist in the East. Hofstede (2001) illustrates

[t]he Western concern with Truth is supported by an axiom in western logic that a statement excludes its opposite. If "A" is true, "non-A", which is the opposite of A, must be false. Eastern logic does not have such an axiom. If A is true, non-A may also be true, and together they produce a wisdom that is superior to either A or non-A. This is sometimes called the complementarity of *yang* and *yin*, using two Chinese characters that express the male and

female elements present in all aspects of reality ... Human truth in this philosophical approach is always partial. (p. 363)

Harris and Dibben (1999) stress the importance of the situational context when assessing another person's trustworthiness and analyze the impact of Hofstede's power distance index (PDI) in this regard. The power distance index refers to the extent to which individuals expect and accept an unequal distribution of power in a society (Hofstede, 1984). Since differences in people's expectations as to what is seen as appropriate communication in a given situation also depend on the culturally determined expectations of a rather equal or rather unequal distribution of power, the power distance index might also impact the appropriateness of the chosen communication style in a given situation.

Direct and indirect communication

Most research agrees that individualistic and low-context cultures tend to communicate in a rather direct and explicit manner, whereas collectivistic and high-context cultures tend to communicate more implicitly and indirectly (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hall, 1977; Ulijn, O'Hair, Weggeman, Ledlow, & Hall, 2000). As a result, what is seen as 'normal' and appropriate communication or behavior in one culture, may be seen as rather inappropriate and even impolite and rude in another culture. According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), a direct communication style refers to "... the extent speakers reveal their intentions through explicit verbal communication" (p. 100). The authors determine a direct verbal communication mode as "... verbal messages that embody and invoke speakers' true intentions in terms of their wants, needs, and desires in the discourse process" (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 100). An indirect communication mode, on the contrary, is characterized in terms of verbal messages "... that camouflage and conceal speakers' true intentions in terms of their wants, needs, and goals ..." (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 100). Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's (1988) definition of the direct and indirect mode is in close conformity with Hall's (1977) conceptualization of high-context and low-context communication cultures, as introduced in the previous chapter.

The concept of *self*, in addition, can be found in the literature to be discussed in close relation to the preferred degree of directness of individuals from one common

culture (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) point out that the different value orientations of members from diverse cultures influences their preference for a rather direct or rather indirect communication style. Whereas the value orientation of low-context and individualistic cultures results in direct verbal expressions and people emphasize the ability to speak their minds freely, high-context and collectivistic cultures in contrast, emphasize group harmony and group conformity, and therefore, use a rather imprecise and ambiguous communication style. Although telling the truth is viewed positively as being honest, and indicates a person's openness and honesty in a low-context communication culture, high-context communication cultures, on the other hand, tend to use understatements and a more indirect communication style to contain group harmony, save face, and avoid hurting other peoples' feelings (Hall, 1977). Triandis (1995), furthermore, argues that members of individualistic cultures emphasize linguistic clarity and tend to prefer and encourage open criticism over *face*-saving strategies, even if they risk damaging relationships between parties.⁵ Likewise, some scholars conclude, that individualistic cultures tend to prefer a direct and confrontation-centered communication style, whereas collectivistic cultures prefer a more indirect and agreement-centered communication style (Limaye & Victor, 1991; Engholm, 1991). Engholm (1991), in addition, points out that Asian cultures (HC-COL) tend to prefer communication styles leading to compromising win-win situations in order to maintain group harmony, and preserve, and protect *face*. Western cultures (LC-IND) on the contrary, tend to prefer open confrontations and 'creative conflict' to discuss ideas. From a business point of view, Engholm (1991) suggests that the "... Westerners' transparent approach to resolving conflict results in an additional clash that may stifle communication and threaten further business relationships in Asia" (p. 108).

Silence is often used by high-context cultures to communicate and can be used to indicate several attitudes or moods (Hall, 1977; Lewis, 2006; Trompenaars, 1994). Silence can be used to communicate truthfulness, disapproval, embarrassment, or disagreement (Hall, 1977). According to Trompenaars (1994), silence in high-context cultures can also indicate interest, since the person is thinking or needs to think about what was said. Members of low-context cultures, on the contrary, easily feel

⁵ The concept of face will be introduced shortly in this chapter.

uncomfortable with extended silence and tend to interpret silence negatively, and interest is shown by interrupting the other person. Low-context and individualistic cultures are more concerned with clarity in conversations and view direct communication and direct requests as the most effective communication strategy to accomplish goals (Gudykunst, et al., 1996).

A number of studies, moreover, agree that high-context cultures tend to prefer oral or face-to-face communication, whereas low-context cultures tend to prefer written means of communication (Limaye & Victor, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Ulijn et al., 2000). This can be explained due to the fact that most of the information and meaning in a conversation in high-context cultures is embedded in the context or internalized in the person, whereas people from low-context cultures tend to prefer most information to be explicitly stated (Hall, 1977). Similar findings were detected in studies concerning writing styles. It was found that Koreans (collectivists) tend to use a less direct approach in addressing complaints in letters and tend to address negative issues towards the end of written communication (Ulijn, et al., 2000). Americans from the United States (individualists), on the other hand, were found to use a more direct approach and do not hesitate to state negative issues very early in a letter (Ulijn et al., 2000).

Due to China's cultural characteristics as a collectivistic and high-context culture, members of the Chinese culture are expected to be less direct than members of individualistic and low-context cultures, and therefore, are described to have a preference for an indirect mode; from a Western perspective anyway. Although considered a collectivistic and high-context culture, recent studies have found that the Chinese can be more direct than expected and typically described in the Western mainstream literature (Lewis, 2006; Wang, 2010; Beamer, 2003). Lewis (2006), for instance, stresses that the Chinese, even though members of a collectivistic and high-context culture, tend to be more direct than the Japanese and members of many other East-Asian countries. Nonetheless, members of the Chinese culture highly value group harmony and the preservation of politeness in conversational encounters.

Recent research examining directness in business letters also questions the hitherto predominant perception of a preference of the Chinese for an indirect mode (Beamer, 2003; Ding, 2006). Beamer (2003) and Wang (2010) found that indirectness is not necessarily the preferred communication mode of the Chinese business people. Examining Chinese business letters from the 19th century, Beamer (2003) found that

indirectness was used by the Chinese “... as a means for establishing an informational context for the communication act ...” (p. 234), and for providing background information. The preference for and use of directness, on the other hand, was found to rise with an increase of proximity in the relationship (Beamer, 2003). The longer the timeframe of the relationship and the greater the frequency, the more direct the communication appeared to be. Furthermore, Wang (2010) found similar preferences for members of the United States of America and China in applying direct and indirect strategies in his study. Wang (2010), therefore, highlights the importance of situational factors when assessing preferences for a direct or indirect communication style, and concludes that “... the rhetorical mechanism of directness and indirectness is contextually sensitive rather than culturally bound” (p. 118).

Similar to Beamer (2003), Ding (2006) lends support to the observation that Chinese tend to use indirectness in business letters to establish personal relationships before addressing business matters. However, Ding (2006) stresses the importance of the prevailing influence of Confucianism and its impact on the preference for an indirect mode in Chinese communication.

Bello, Ragsdale, Brandau-Brown, and Thibodeaux (2006), in addition, mention research projects in their study, supporting the view that the Chinese sometimes communicate in a more direct manner than expected from a Western perspective. Bello et al. (2006), however, point out that the directness of the Chinese in this regard is in relation to taboo topics, and not due to their communication style. The authors furthermore argue that topics considered to be taboo may vary across cultures, and hence, are not related to linguistic directness in conversations (Bello et al., 2006).

Face and facework

The concepts of *face* or *facework* are discussed in the literature to account for crucial distinctions between cultures, giving rise to significant cultural misunderstandings (Lewis, 2006; Engholm, 1991). The concept of *face*, according to Lustig and Koester (2003), refers to the “... public expression of the inner self” (p. 274). Although a review of the literature reveals that the concept of *face* exists in all cultures (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Masumoto, Yokochi, Pan, Takai & Wicox, 2001), Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) point out that the “... meanings and usages are different depending on the culture” (p.

36). In other words, *face* is an important social *self* concept, but different conceptualizations exist across cultures.

Face can be defined as “... the claimed sense of favorable social self-worth...” (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p. 36) that a person wants others to have of him or her and “[i]t is only meaningful when perceived in relation to others” (Ting-Toomey & Cocroft, 1994, p. 307). According to Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001), three types of face concerns can be differentiated. The concept of *self-face* refers to the “... protective concern for one’s own image when one’s own face is threatened ...”, *other-face* is the concern for accommodating someone else’s image, and “[m]utual-face is the concern for both parties’ images, the image of the relationship, or all three” (p. 37). The concept of *facework* refers to communicative strategies used to maintain self-face and foster, maintain, or repair other- or mutual face (Oetzel et al., 2001). In short, *facework* is used to manage the three types of face concerns (Oetzel et al., 2001).

As a further development of Goffman’s (1955) face theory, Brown and Levinson (1987) developed a theory on politeness, relating face concerns to communication behavior, based on the dimensions of *positive* and *negative face* (Oetzel et al., 2001). According to Cupach and Imahori (1993), *positive face* refers to “... an individual’s desire to be appreciated and approved by important others”, whereas *negative face* refers to “... the desire to be autonomous and free from the imposition of others” (Cupach & Imahori, 1993, p. 116). Brown and Levinson (1987) focus on different speech acts that cause threats of *face* and define different levels of *facework* strategies that may cause a threat in *positive* or *negative face* in a politeness situation (Oetzel et al., 2001).⁶ Oetzel et al. (2001), moreover, point out that “[t]he politeness approach emphasizes mitigating threat to other-face (e.g., minimizing the positive and negative face of the other during a request situation), but does not focus on self-face” (p. 238).

Although it is widely agreed that culture is an important element for investigating *face* and *facework*, most studies on politeness fail to take the cross-cultural aspect into account (Oetzel et al., 2001). According to Oetzel et al. (2001), exceptions are Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, Cupach and Imahori’s

⁶ Although Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory is not free of criticism, it is discussed as groundbreaking and has been refined and updated by other scholars (Ting-Toomey & Cocroft, 1994).

(1993) identity management theory (IMT), as well as Ting-Toomey's (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001) face-negotiation theory (FNT).

Interpersonal communication theories

Cupach and Imahori's identity management theory arose from interpersonal communication competence theories and is based on symbolic interactionism, as well as Goffman's (1955) work on self-presentation and facework (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida & Ogawa, 2005). Cupach and Imahori (1993) argue that the theory of interpersonal communication can be applied or is "generalizable" to intercultural contexts, and "... can provide insight regarding competence in intercultural interactions and relationships" (p. 112). The authors, furthermore, point out that the identity management theory offers a useful understanding for communication competence in intercultural interactions, which are considered as a special case of interpersonal communication. The concept of face is crucial to Cupach and Imahori's (1993) identity management theory, since "[a]spects of a person's identity are revealed and recognized in communication through the presentation of *face*" (p. 116). The authors, furthermore, argue that "[t]he maintenance of face is a natural and inevitable condition of human interaction" (Cupach & Imahori, 1993, p. 116). Since successfully managing face in interpersonal interactions is seen as a crucial factor of interpersonal communication competence, Cupach and Imahori (1993) conclude that this extends to intercultural communication competence as well (Gudykunst et al., 2005).

Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001) arose from a theory focusing on conflict, however, was also strongly influenced by Goffman's (1955), and Brown and Levinson (1987) work. The face-negotiation theory was developed to "... provide a sound explanatory construct to explain differences and similarities in face and facework during conflict" (Oetzel et al., 2001, p. 238), and "... has been expanded to integrate cultural-level dimensions and individual-level attributes to explain face concerns, conflict styles, and facework behaviors" (Gudykunst & Lee, 2003, p. 22).

Oetzel et al. (2001) differentiate culturally specific conceptualizations of *face* in their study and point out that *face* in the Chinese culture consists of two types, 'lien' (or lian), which refers to the moral character of a person, and 'mien-tzu' (or mianzi), which refers to social status. Woo and Prud'homme (1999) emphasize the

importance of the concept for the Chinese by stating “[t]o the Chinese, face can be compared with a prized commodity, something that can be given, earned, taken away, or lost” (p. 317). The German concept of *Gesicht* (face), on the contrary, only refers to the social image presented to others. Although differences in the conceptualization of face exist across cultures, the authors emphasize that face is associated with trust, relationships and network connections, respect, status, reputation, and loyalty in all four countries examined in their study (China, Japan, Germany, and United States of America) (Oetzel et al., 2001).

Communication mode in relation to self and face

The concept of *self* can be found in the literature to be discussed in relation to the concept of *facework*, and provides a useful explanation of the differences for preferred degrees of directness across cultures. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) explain that the Western, or individualistic, conception of the *self* is analytic, monotheistic, rationalistic, and most importantly, individualistic. The collectivistic conception of the self, in contrast, refers to the close “... relationships with other human beings and does not emerge from the individual alone, as it does in individualistic cultures” (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 82). The authors illustrate that in collectivistic cultures, such as China, the *self* is characterized via strong interconnected social and personal relationships, whereas individualistic cultures treat the concept of the *self* as an intrapsychic phenomenon (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). These culturally determined differences in the conception of the *self* result in a strong focus of a “we” identity for collectivistic cultures, in contrast to an “I” identity for individualistic cultures. Scholars, as a result, argue that members of individualistic cultures seem to be rather concerned with *self-face* maintenance, whereas members of collectivistic cultures seem to be rather concerned with *self-face* and *other-face* maintenance (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish between three levels of directness in regard to performing face-threatening acts. Off-record strategies have a strong focus on face-redress, on-record strategies, which allow being polite and direct at the same time, and bald-on-record strategies, which have a clear focus on clarity and efficiency, with no attention paid to face concerns (Ogiermann, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987). It needs to be mentioned again that these concepts are from an Anglo-Saxon

perception, and although universally applicable, their interpretation of directness and *face*-concerns may vary across cultures.

It is widely agreed in the literature that the Chinese generally communicate in a rather indirect and implicit manner in order to maintain group harmony and safe face (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Kim, 2002; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Hall, 1977). Emphasis is placed on how something is said and what is not said. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), therefore, highlight that the indirect, implicit, and ambiguous communication style of the Chinese can easily be misinterpreted by Westerners as insincerity and untrustworthiness.

The following table generated by Ting-Toomey (1988) provides an easily understandable summary of the key elements of cultural differences between high-context, collectivistic cultures, and low-context, individualistic cultures:

Key Constructs of "Face"	Individualistic, Low-Context Cultures	Collectivistic, High-Context Cultures
Identity	emphasis on "I" identity	emphasis on "we" identity
Concern	self-face concern	other-face concern
Needs	autonomy, dissociation, negative-face need	inclusion, association, positive-face needs
Suprastrategy	self positive-face and self-negative face	other positive-face and other negative-face
Mode	direct mode	indirect mode
Style	controlling style or confrontation style, and solution-oriented style	obliging style or avoidance style, and affective-oriented style
Strategy	distributive or competitive strategies	integrative or collaborative strategies
Speech act	direct speech acts	indirect speech acts
Nonverbal act	individualistic nonverbal acts, direct emotional expressions	contextualistic (role-oriented) nonverbal acts, indirect emotional expressions

Table 1: Key elements of cultural differences in communication styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 230)

Although not all members of one culture are alike, Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) highlight that different cultures have distinctive communication patterns or

practices. The clear link between cultural values, preferred communication styles, and face needs as well as face concerns becomes apparent by comparing the two groups (HC-COL and LC-IND).

The Western approach

It needs to be mentioned that the ‘Western’ perspective on effective communication, which refers to shorter lines of communication, is popular in the current management literature due to the fact that most of the literature is from a Western point of view. Although a variety of authors acknowledge the importance of distinguishing among the vast variety of countries broadly categorized as *East* and *West*, literature agrees that models developed by Westerners rely on Western cognitive frames, and linear communication processes, and fail to take the distinctiveness of culturally determined cognitive frames and communication processes into account (Kim, 2010; Hofstede, 2001; Limaye & Victor, 1991). Varner (2000), therefore, concludes: “[a]s a result, people think differently, approach business problems differently, and communicate differently” (p. 47). In addition, Kim (2010) makes the criticism that most studies on intercultural communication today are from a U.S. (Western) and positivistic stance, comparing the U.S. culture to other predominantly Asian cultures, causing a homogenization and oversimplification of Asian cultures for the rest of world. Although the term ‘Asia’ and ‘Asian cultures’ is commonly used throughout the literature (Engholm, 1991), Kim (2010) highlights that the term Asia, and hence clustering Asian cultures together, can be seen as an extremely unsatisfactory term due to the huge variety of cultures and the size of the region.⁷ Kim (2010), furthermore, makes the criticism that the predominantly Western mainstream literature uses Western cultures as standards to measure the rest of the world, and to evaluate or rather judge what level of verbal or direct communication is seen as normal, versus deviant, irrational or inferior, on the other hand.

The Chinese concept of guanxi

When talking about cultural differences, a variety of scholars highlight the importance of the Chinese concept of *guanxi* and its origin in Confucianism (Hofstede, 2001; Bjerke, 1999; Kim, 1995; Bello et al., 2006). *Guanxi* is not easy to

⁷ This paper, however, refers to ‘Asia’ from time to time in order to point out general differences between Western and Eastern points of view.

translate as no direct equivalent of the concept exists in English. It can best be translated as ‘networks’, ‘relationships’, or ‘connections’ (Bjerke, 1999; Hofstede, 2001), and is based on mutual obligations (Bjerke, 1999). According to Hofstede (2001), *guanxi* “... refers to personal connections; it links the family sphere to the business sphere” (p. 362). The concept highlights the significance of personal network of acquaintances, due to the collectivistic nature of the Chinese culture (Hofstede, 2001). Based on Confucian thinking, *guanxi* refers to the inter-relatedness of all individuals in a social web, since “Confucianism promotes collective goals as its ultimate goal” (Kim, 1995, p. 670). Triandis (1995) refers to a Chinese study highlighting the significance of *guanxi* for the Chinese by stating that establishing connections between individuals or companies is of highest priority for Chinese, and determining what the *guanxi* is between people and how strong the *guanxi* is was discussed as the most essential part of a first meeting.

Although modernization lead to a decline of the influence of Confucianism today, Kim (1995), nonetheless, notes that Confucian core values and the significance of human relatedness remain strong in the Chinese culture. Due to the enduring influence of Confucian values on the Chinese culture, cultural differences can cause vital distinctions between the meaning of the Chinese concept of *guanxi* and the possible Western perception of it as a “... cultivation of relationships ...” (Bjerke, 1999, p. 160), which may be associated with bribery and corruption from a Western point of view.

According to a variety of scholars, good relationships and networks are the foundation for business deals in China and developing such networks is even more important than generating profits (Bjerke, 1999; Hofstede, 2001; Ding, 2006; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Bjerke (1999) stresses the importance to understand the role of *guanxi* in Chinese business and points out that “[t]he Chinese network of networks is a new paradigm, a new formulation within the framework of the world’s economy” (p. 159). Even though unthinkable from a Western perspective, Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) point out that good relationships in China are of even greater value than doing a job well.

Likewise, *guanxi* is discussed to account for trust, and Bjerke (1999) points out that “[b]usiness with a Chinese over and above simple buying and selling is to a large extend based on trust. Chinese business boils down to contacts” (p. 158). Since trusting relationships play a vital role in conducting business in China, developing

such trusting relationships can take a long time and different from Western protocol, the networking starts even before the business is started (Bjerke, 1999). Ding (2006), likewise, emphasizes differences to a Western business approach by stating that for the Chinese the "... completion of a business transaction does not mean the end of a business association; instead, it is only the beginning of a process for individuals to develop and maintain a friendly personal relationship" (p. 94).

According to Bello et al. (2006), the Chinese notion of *guanxi* also accounts for the preference of the Chinese for an indirect communication style. Since the concept of *guanxi* is included in the collectivistic nature of the Chinese culture, the authors suggest that an indirect mode is chosen in order to promote group harmony, as a key concept of Confucianism, and to honor relationships by avoiding the direct mentioning of unpleasant or negative topics (Bello et al., 2006). Hofstede (2001), furthermore, points out that harmony is a key principle of Confucian teaching and "... is found in the maintenance of everybody's *face* ..." (p. 354). Since "[f]ace is an essential element of Chinese politeness" (Fang, 2003, p. 356), and due to the influence of Confucianism and *guanxi*, it is not surprising that the literature suggests a preference for an indirect communication style for members of the Chinese culture. With *guanxi* and *face* being key concepts in the Chinese culture, the maintenance of group harmony in inter-related social networks suggests an indirect mode of communication.

Conceptions of time

It is widely agreed in the literature that developing trusting relationships takes time (Greenberg, 2011; Greenberg & Baron, 2008; Bjerke, 1999; Rousseau et al., 1998; Harris & Dibben, 1999). How much time it takes, and how much trust is required for a successful relationship heavily depends on an individual's cultural background though (Engholm, 2001; Bjerke, 1999; Lewis, 2006). Whereas, for instance, U.S. Americans and Germans as members of a high-trust and low-context culture only require a short period of time to establish business relationships and business deals are closed with a written contract, members of the Chinese low-trust, and high-context culture, in contrast, require a much longer timeframe in order to establish personal relationships and trust, and business contracts are perceived rather as a starting point for a discussion than the final closing of a business deal (Lewis, 2006; Bjerke, 1999).

Hofstede's (2001) fifth dimension long-term orientation (LTO), also referred to as 'Confucian dynamism' (Fang, 2003), contributes an explanation of why culturally diverse individuals require different time frames for establishing trusting business relationships. Long-term versus short-term orientation, according to Hofstede (2001), "... is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present" (p. 29). Therefore, long-term oriented cultures such as China are described as focusing on building strong market positions to gain or maintain future benefits, whereas cultures ranking low on the long-term dimension, for instance Germany and New Zealand, rather focus on short-term and bottom-line results (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001), in addition, discusses the long-term index in relation to *guanxi*, as the importance of the lifelong capital of *guanxi* contributes to the long-term orientation of the Chinese culture.

Hofstede (2001) stresses the fact that the long-term dimension was not identified in his original research as a result of culturally diverse ways of thinking, "... the Western minds of the designers ..." (p. 351) in particular. The long-term dimension evolved due to an additional survey designed on the basis of values suggested by Chinese scholars (Hofstede, 2001), since cultural differences in cognition and ways of thinking did not enable an identification of this dimension by Western minds.

It can, moreover, be argued that the culturally diverse conceptions of the self have an impact on the required timeframe for developing relationships, and hence vary across cultures. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) highlight that *facework* in low-context cultures is seen as an overt communication process, where everything needs to be spelled out, arguments typically follow a linear logic pattern, and *face*-negotiation is based on an immediate cost-reward-comparison model. Therefore, a direct communication mode is preferred in order to achieve quick, hence, time saving outcomes. In high-context cultures, on the contrary, the *face*-negotiation procedure is seen as an accumulative long-term process, since members of high-context cultures are interconnected with the group, not seeing themselves as separate from the group (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). This interconnectedness with the group causes larger social implications for every member and the whole group. Arguments are typically expressed ambiguously and *facework* appeals follow a spiral logic pattern. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), therefore, suggest that "[f]ace-negotiation in

high-context systems probably is based on a long-term, cost-reward-comparison model” (p. 90).

A variety of scholars relate cross-cultural communication differences to the *monochronic* and *polychronic* conceptions of time (Hall, 1977; Limaye & Victor, 1991). It is argued that people in monochronic cultures tend to follow a direct approach and view time as linear (Hall, 1977; Limaye & Victor, 1991). Limaye and Victor (1991) highlight that members from monochronic cultures “... come to the point very quickly with little introductory phrasing” (p. 286 f.) and “... tend to value quick responses in discussion with little introductory phrasing or politeness” (p. 287). This can be explained based on monochronic culture’s perception that time is a scarce resource and results in the notion that ‘time is money’. Polychronic cultures, on the other hand, tend to communicate more indirectly and view time as flexible (Limaye & Victor, 1991). Communication, thus, tends to be more circular, and often goes off “... on tangents to the main subject to place all information in its proper context” (Limaye & Victor, 1991, p. 287). Therefore, polychronic cultures often view the monochronic’s direct approach as rude and impolite. Taking cultural differences in notions of time into account, it is not surprising that for instance the German’s pursuit of efficiency is resulting in direct and straightforward communication patterns, which therefore can easily be misunderstood by more polychronic cultures.

Honesty and openness

Honesty and openness, as discussed earlier, are close concepts for members of individualistic, low-context cultures, such as Germany (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Lewis, 2006), and a direct and open communication approach is perceived as an indication for trustworthiness, as the sharing of information is seen as a vital element for the establishment of trust. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) point out that the value orientation of individualistic cultures “... foster the norms of honesty and openness” (p. 102), and “[h]onesty and openness are achieved through the use of precise, straightforward language behaviors” (p. 102). A direct communication approach allowing for an exchange of arguments and straightforward questions to gather information quickly in order to close business deals as fast as possible, therefore, might work well if business partners hold culturally similar values, beliefs, and worldviews, hence, similar attitudes towards business relationships and appropriate behavior. However, in cultures where the establishment of trusting

relationships is seen as more important than the actual closing of a business deal, such a direct communication style can easily cause expensive misunderstandings. Although indirectness might be perceived as a 'waste of time' by some rather low-context-oriented cultures, the majority of scholars correlate indirectness with/to politeness and face-concerns (Ogiermann, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987). From an Anglo-Saxon perspective, hence, the degree of politeness in a conversation can be increased by applying a more indirect communication style (Ogiermann, 2009).

Thomas (2008) points out that "[i]n collectivistic cultures, politeness and a desire to avoid embarrassment often take precedence over truth, as truth is defined in individual cultures" (p. 124). It becomes clear after this discussion that taking cultural differences into account is of critical importance for successful business relations across cultures (Msanjila & Afsarmanesh, 2008). The appropriateness and effectiveness of unambiguous, open and direct communication, therefore, needs to be considered in the context of cultural diversity. According to Thomas and Inkson (2009), the challenge is to manage the intercultural communication process without violating cultural norms or patterns.

Politeness theory

Literature on direct and indirect communication can often be found in close relation to a discussion of politeness (Ogiermann, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Oetzel et al., 2001). Whereas indirectness is often linked to politeness, directness is often perceived as a lack thereof, and as a lack of concern for other people's face. Ogiermann (2009), however, points out that this perception of direct communication being considered a lack of concern for other people's face is an interpretation not only from a Western but from an Anglo-Saxon point of view in particular. Pragmatic politeness theories suggest a correlation between politeness and indirectness, not taking into account that directness can also be viewed as pragmatic clarity, which is highly appreciated by low-context cultures. Moreover, in following up on the previous discussion, directness, or pragmatic clarity, is also associated with honesty in some cultures, whilst an indirect communication style can be seen as devious or manipulative behavior, and even as a waste of time (Ogiermann, 2009). The slogan 'time is money', which is often used by Westerners to speed up business deals, might work well in one common culture, but easily leads to issues when applying such a direct and time pressured approach to another culture.

Interestingly, Ogiermann (2009) highlights that [t]he reluctance to clearly formulate one's wishes may be interpreted as an attempt to save one's own face while putting the hearer in a position where she or he has to take the initiative for the speaker's wishes to be fulfilled. The increased degree of optionality is illusive since once the slightest hint is dropped, the hearer feels compelled to take it up and offer what the speaker is too reluctant to ask for. Ignoring such a hint would be impolite, therefore, an indirect request may put more pressure on the hearer than a straightforward one. (p. 192 f.)

Taking into account that most literature on intercultural communication and politeness is from a Western point of view, Ogiermann's (2009) statement clearly reveals the need for more research from culturally diverse perspectives in order to increase understanding of the broad variety of culturally diverse perceptions.

Likewise, the preference for efficiency and truthfulness over face-concerns is often discussed in the literature in relation to politeness, or rather impoliteness in this case (Xie & House, 2009; Ogiermann, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the bald-on-record strategy provides a useful framework for achieving maximally efficient communication, by being non-spurious (speaking the truth and being sincere), perspicuous, and avoiding ambiguity and obscurity. The authors, however, stress that the desire to take *face*-concerns into account is a powerful and pervasive reason for not applying the bald-on-strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness, therefore, can be seen as a deviation from rationale efficiency (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As mentioned earlier, the efficiency of the bald-on-record strategy depends on the cultural context.

Efficiency, honesty, and truth are highly valued concepts in the German culture, which is also reflected in the German communication style. Lewis (2006), as an U.S. American though, defines the German communication style as "... frank, open, direct and often loud" (p. 225), which is in close relation to the definition of directness in this research project. The author, moreover, mentions the German desire for honesty and directness, and stresses that for Germans, truth comes before tact and diplomacy (Lewis, 2006).

A number of studies agree that for Germans the 'truth is the truth', and speaking the truth is seen as more important than paying attention to *face*-concerns

(Lewis, 2006; Xie & House, 2009). German sayings such as “Iss, was gar ist, trink, was klar ist, [und] sprich, was wahr ist” (Simrock, 2003, p. 272, as cited in Xie & House, 2009, p. 432), which means “[e]at what’s been well cooked, drink liquids which are clear, and speak what is true” (Xie & House, 2009, p. 432), as well as “Die Wahrheit ist die Wahrheit” (Lewis, 2006, p. 5), which means the truth is the truth, also lend support to this observation. Since honesty and truth are closely related to directness in the German culture, and are essential for the German’s notion of trust or trusting relationships, being confronted with a member from a collectivistic, high-context culture like for example China, easily reveals in miscommunication and misunderstandings. Since a variety of studies agree that politeness and indirectness are closely interwoven (Ogiermann, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Oetzel et al., 2001), it is not surprising that an (too) indirect and polite communication style might not only be perceived as devious or manipulative, but also as lying in some cases. Xie and House (2009) quote Goethe in this regard by saying: ““Im Deutschen lügt man, wenn man höflich ist” (In German one lies, when one is polite)” (as cited in Xie & House, 2009, p. 432). Consequently, using an indirect communication style in order to be or act polite might not be perceived as polite by all cultures, but can also be interpreted as hiding information or even as lying.

Need for further research

Differences in preferred communication styles can lead to enormous misunderstandings and hinder the establishment of trust, or even worse, make it impossible. Since culture operates at a very deep and unconscious level, and influences how people perceive and interpret communication behavior, awareness and knowledge of cultural diversity can be seen as key factors for effective communication and developing trust. Similarly, once broken or damaged, lack of trust is often discussed as a key barrier to communication (Nishishiba & Ritchie, 2000). Therefore, researching the impact of directness on culturally diverse individuals’ perception of trust can be seen as essential for improving successful intercultural business relationships.

The review of the current literature on intercultural communication research clearly reveals a gap, and thus need for more empirical research, from a qualitative perspective in particular (Kim, 2010; Kristjansdottir, 2009; DeSanctis & Jiang, 2005; Martin & Nakayama, 1997 and 1999). Harris and Dibben (1999) make the critique

that “... the development and impact of interpersonal trust in international business remains comparatively understudied” (p. 464). Likewise, the matter of how trust develops in intercultural context and what elements are seen as crucial have only been minimally researched until now (McAllister, 1995). Since the development of interpersonal trust in the context of international business also involves intercultural communication, this study aims to follow up on the call for more qualitative research in this area.

Due to a lack of sufficient empirical research in the area of intercultural communication, qualitative research in particular, this research project aims to provide additional data to deepen the understanding of the relationship between directness, as an element of intercultural communication, and the establishment of trust in international/intercultural business relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

This research design chapter is divided into two parts, starting with an introduction to the methodological approach, followed by the presentation of the chosen research method for this study. The first part of this chapter introduces the qualitative research approach, and provides an explanation as to why this approach was chosen.

The second part of this chapter outlines in detail the data collection method used in this research project. Before the data collection method is described in detail, a cultural profile of the three focus group cultures is presented. The chapter starts with an overview of how the concept of discussing scenarios in the focus groups emerged for this study, followed by a description of the pilot and the introduction of the scenarios used in the focus groups. Afterwards, general advantages and disadvantages of the focus group method are discussed, followed by the description of the focus groups' structure and a profile of the participants. Ethical considerations and limitations are presented at the end of this chapter.

An overall qualitative research approach is applied in this research project, as the focus is in investigating the perceptions and thoughts of participants in-depth. The purpose of this research project is twofold. Firstly, to investigate how directness is perceived by participants from diverse cultures, and secondly, how and why differences in participant's perceptions of directness influence the perception of trust in an intercultural business relationship. The assumptions underlying the qualitative approach are most suitable for capturing the complex nature of intercultural communication in action, and hence, for researching the impact of directness on trust in intercultural settings. A qualitative research approach, therefore, offers the researcher the opportunity to capture in-depth insight views, and to enhance understanding of participant's feelings and perceptions.

Methodology

According to Collis and Hussey (2003), research can be succinctly defined as a systematic and methodical process of investigation in order to increase knowledge. Research methods, therefore, can be characterized as “... the strategies researchers use ...” (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000, p. 13) to collect evidence, which is necessary for building and testing explanations. The ability to test and replicate research, are crucial characteristics for validity and reliability of the research findings, and critical for credibility. Research findings can be considered as reliable when they are repeatable, and generate the same findings each time. Research, hence, leads to reliable conclusions.

The general approach to research is referred to as the research paradigm, and according to Collis and Hussey (2003), “[t]he term paradigm refers to the progress of scientific practice based on people’s philosophies and assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge; in this context, about how research should be conducted” (p. 17).⁸ The positivistic and phenomenological approaches are two extreme characteristics along a continuum, and differ in their research goals and preferred methods and methodologies. The two approaches are based on “... different fundamental assumptions about human nature, human behaviour, and the nature of knowledge” (Martin & Nakayama, 1997).

Qualitative research approach

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study, as this approach takes the complex nature of intercultural communication and the importance of (social) context into account, and is concerned with richness of data and with providing an in-depth understanding of phenomena. Qualitative research “... involves examining and reflecting on perceptions in order to gain an understanding of social and human activities” (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p. 13), which is at the heart of this research project.

The qualitative approach is sometimes discussed as being value-laden and biased, since the researcher’s interactions with the researched is considered to affect

⁸ Although a variety of different terms exist in the literature, this paper will refer to the paradigms as quantitative or positivistic research paradigm and qualitative or phenomenological research paradigm. Alternative terms for the positivistic paradigm are objectivistic, scientific, or traditionalist, and for the phenomenological paradigm interpretivist, subjectivist, or humanistic (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

the research process and its outcomes. In particular in intercultural communication research, where context is seen as crucial owing to the high complexity of the subject, it is the aim of phenomenologists to provide an understanding of what is happening in a specific situation. Research, therefore, is conducted to explain phenomena and construct theories, and typically small samples are used to assure richness, in-depth, and quality of data (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Consequently, qualitative researchers move from individual observations to statements of general patterns of laws, and generalizations are made from one setting to another (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Accuracy and reliability are assured through verification.

Collis and Hussey (2003) argue that the phenomenological paradigm evolved as a result of criticisms of the positivistic approach, since the "... social sciences deal with actions and behaviour which are generated from within the human mind" (p. 53). It is, moreover, argued by phenomenological researchers that the researcher and the researched are impossible to separate, since "... social reality is within us; therefore the act of investigating reality has an effect on that reality" (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p. 53).

However, analyzing findings and drawing conclusions is often complicated, and scholars point out that only a few qualitative intercultural communication studies exist so far, and stress the need for more qualitative empirical research (Kristjansdottir, 2009; Martin & Nakayama, 1997 and 1999). The crux of the matter of qualitative research, therefore, is how well the data is grouped, themes identified, and data is analyzed.

Paradigmatic crisis and need for more qualitative research

According to a variety of scholars, the field of intercultural communication is currently in a paradigmatic crisis, moving from the so far dominant positivistic research approach to a more critical, or dialectic perspective (Martinez, 2008; Shenkar, Luo & Yeheskel, 2008; Yoshitake, 2004). Whereas the positivistic approach is predominant in business research, it is often criticized in communication and cultural research. Yoshitake (2004) makes the criticism that positivism examines communication as a monologue, thus, fails to capture the dialogic nature of communication. Culture, moreover, is complex and dynamic in nature, and should not be analyzed out of context. The weakness of the positivistic paradigm, of not taking the context into account, plays a vital role in intercultural communication research.

Due to the complex nature of intercultural communication, conducting research in a context free environment, where culture is seen as a factor that influences the communication process, results in a 'mechanistic' image of communication, and fails to capture its complexity (Yoshitake, 2004). Furthermore, the positivistic argument for objectivity within the field of intercultural communication is somewhat difficult, since the researcher's cultural background has an influence on the chosen paradigm and the research methodology. Culture operates at such a deep and unconscious level that every aspect of human life is influenced. Individual perceptions and assumptions about the world and reality, hence, are influenced without people being aware of it. Being independent from the researched, as positivistic research claims to be, becomes almost impossible in intercultural communication research, since culture unconsciously influences human behavior, values, and attitudes, hence, perceptions of things and the communication process itself. When communicating, people exchange not only words but also attach meaning to behavior and words. The exchange of meaning during the de- and encoding process of communication, thus, is heavily influenced by the cultural background of the researcher, and a researcher's attempt to describe this process, and interpret meaning is based on their own culturally influenced points of reference. Objectivity, therefore, is limited.

In order to provide an insightful explanation of how and why the perception of direct communication varies across cultures and ensure an in-depth understanding of the different perceptions of direct communication, a qualitative data collection method is applied in this research project, in accordance with an overall qualitative approach. Qualitative data collection methods are seen as the most suitable to capture the complex nature of the intercultural communication process and to provide the desired rich data for this research project. Since many quantitative studies exist already in the field of intercultural communication, this research project collected rich, in-depth data to provide a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions of directness in intercultural communication, and contribute to filling the gap in qualitative, empirical research.

Method of data collection

Before the data collection method is introduced in this section, a theoretical profile of the focus group cultures is outlined, in order to facilitate a better understanding of this project.

Cultural profiles of the focus group

The German and Chinese cultures were chosen for this research project since the two cultures are discussed to differ significantly in their cultural dimensions of high- and low-context communication (Hall, 1977), and individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1984), according to the literature. As mentioned elsewhere, China has been chosen as an example of a rather high-context, and collectivistic culture, being discussed in the literature as having a preference for an indirect, implicit communication style. Germany, on the contrary, has been chosen as an example of a rather low-context and individualistic culture, with a preference for direct and explicit communication. Due to the cultural profile of the two countries, it was considered likely that members of the German and Chinese cultures prefer different degrees of directness in their communication.

New Zealand has been chosen as a contrast group, as it was considered likely that New Zealand may result in a placing between the German and Chinese cultures in terms of preference for direct communication. Since New Zealand is considered to be an individualistic country, according to Hofstede (1984), it was considered likely that New Zealand participants, therefore, prefer a low-context and rather direct communication style. However, it needs to be mentioned that New Zealand's population is, and in the future even more will be, increasingly influenced by a huge variety of different nationalities and thus cultures. This study, therefore, focused on New-Zealand-born Europeans, in order to allow for a culturally specific outcome of the research project. The influence of other cultures on the New Zealand culture, causing a rather 'mixed picture' of the New Zealand culture in terms of theoretical explanations, however, will be explained in the discussion chapter.

Since most studies focus on cultural differences between the United States of America and Japan, the German and Chinese cultures were chosen for this research project in order to avoid a replication of existing studies, yet at the same time utilizing the concepts of existing studies to gather data about different cultures. Although much has already been written about the German and Chinese cultures in general, little

research exists in the field on intercultural communication, qualitative, empirical research in particular. Findings of this research project are compared to existing literature, and are intended to expand current knowledge.

Data collection

Data was collected in the form of (culturally specific) thoughts, perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of participants. In accordance with Harris and Dibben (1999), the aim was to access participants' considerations and beliefs, and their own "... 'native categories' of data by enabling them to express their own underlying beliefs" (p. 471). Enabling participants to express their own ideas and thoughts on the topic facilitated the emergence of culturally specific concepts, themes, and ideas, thus, allowed for the identification of culturally specific underlying values influencing participants' perceptions.

Data was collected at a large metropolitan institute of technology in New Zealand via focus groups. Volunteer students from business studies and business related disciplines were used as focus group participants in order to ensure a sound knowledge of common business practices. Since the outcome of this research project is intended for the use of future recommendations and suggestions for improvements of intercultural communication in an international business setting, participants' background knowledge of business practices was taken into consideration for the sampling process.

The data collection method for this study was the focus group interview. In total, three focus groups took place, each consisting of participants from one common culture. The focus groups were arranged by cultures in order to ensure a culturally specific outcome, and thus, enable the comparison of culturally specific findings across the focus groups. The first focus group consisted of German students (Focus group A), the second focus group consisted of Chinese students (Focus group B), and the third focus group consisted of New Zealand students (Focus group C).

All three focus groups were of the same structure, and the questions asked during the focus groups were in close keeping with the guideline questions. Three critical incidents were discussed in the focus groups; one visual video scene, and two written intercultural communication incidents. The three critical incidents will be referred to as scenarios, and will be explained further later on in this chapter. Due to a careful consideration of the structure of the focus groups, as well as the suitability of

the scenarios and the associated questions, a pilot was conducted before the actual focus groups took place.

For a better understanding, the pilot is introduced next, followed by a discussion on and presentation of the scenarios.

Pilot

As aforementioned, the pilot was conducted before the actual focus groups took place in order to test the suitability of the focus group structure, the scenarios, and the associated questions. The pilot was conducted in the same way the focus groups were designed, in order to generate authentic results. Two participants attended the pilot, and provided useful feedback on the design of the focus group, the scenarios, and the guideline questions. The pilot, therefore, was most useful for refining the focus group questions, and led to several minor changes in the second and third scenario. Due to feedback from the pilot participants, both written scenarios were given more details on the situation to facilitate the accurate understanding of the scenarios, and avoid confusion of participants. Moreover, the cultures of the characters in the third scenario were adapted to the cultures examined in this study. In other words, the U.S. professor in the third scenario was changed to become a German professor. The last two sentences of the third scenario were changed from “Dr. Hastings then ended his meeting with Dr. Xi, thinking that it had gone well. However, Dr. Hastings never heard again from Dr. Xi” (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 163) to “Dr. Müller and Dr. Xi did not hear from each other again”, since participants expressed confusion about why it was the turn of the Chinese professor to contact the other professor again. This modification though, still led to discussions amongst participants in the actual focus groups, and is illustrated later in this thesis.

The first scenario, the digital video disc (DVD) scene (Schrack, 2004), was shown to the pilot participants in order to introduce them to the topic of intercultural communication, and to test the suitability of using a visual element to create a friendly atmosphere. Participants gave positive feedback, and hence, the DVD scene was used in the actual focus groups.

However, participants clearly stated that they were focusing specifically on the topic of directness and indirectness, and hence, reported to be led into one certain direction instead of stating their own points of view on the scenarios. Therefore, the associated questions for all three scenarios were redefined, and leading questions on

directness and indirectness were removed or altered. Following participants' feedback, it was decided not to mention the topic of directness in the focus groups in order to avoid a repetition of the restricting of participants' trains of thought.

Overall, the pilot revealed that the critical incidents and the associated questions were adequate to collect the desired rich and in-depth data needed for this research project. The DVD scene, moreover, was discussed to be appropriate and useful. After the pilot was conducted and the modifications of the scenarios and the associated questions were conducted, further consultation with the researcher's supervisors finalized the focus group design, scenarios, and questions.

Concept of using scenarios

The idea of utilizing and discussing written critical incidents in the form of intercultural communication scenarios emerged for this study as a result of an intensive review of existing studies. Many studies use scenarios, critical incidents (McAllister et al., 2006; Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Tanaka & Bell, 1996; Sullivan & Peterson, 1982), or the discourse completion test (DCT)⁹ as the sole source of data collection, or as one means of collecting data; studies on linguistics in particular (Varghese & Billmyer, 1996; Nelson, Al Batal & El Bakary, 2002; Ogiermann, 2009; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Martinez Flor, 2004). Although this study does not focus on linguistic patterns or speech acts, using scenarios in the form of critical incidents to collect data was seen as most suitable for this study.

Reviewing existing studies utilizing scenarios as a data collection method and developing suitable scenarios and questions, therefore, were a key part of this study, and were seen as central for the successful outcome. Fitzgerald (2001) defines a critical incident as "... a story with a climax, dilemma or issue to be addressed, but no clear resolution. When ... [the critical incident] ends there is still a need to attach meaning before the story can be resolved" (p. 151).

McAllister et al. (2006), likewise, highlight that "... critical incidents are a valuable research tool, especially with respect to understanding intercultural

⁹ The DCT is portrayed as an instrument consisting of brief written context specific situations with the aim of capturing participants' responses to the scenarios, and is typically designed in a written format, providing written scenarios, followed by specific questions, and a few lines of free space for participants to write their answers (Varghese & Billmyer, 1996; Nelson, Al Batal & El Bakary, 2002; Martinez Flor, 2004).

interactions” (p. 371), since they allow for a wide range and richness of interpretations. The utilization of the critical incident method in this study, and the comparison of the findings across the three focus groups in the end, therefore, provides critical information about how and why culturally diverse participants interpret the scenarios differently, according to their underlying cultural values and beliefs (Harris & Dibben, 1999).

Another advantage of utilizing scenarios is that the outcome is easily and fully comparable, since all participants respond to the same scenarios and under the same conditions, which allows for “... making generalizations about what is typical and acceptable in a particular culture and comparing (...) norms across cultures” (Ogiermann, 2009, p. 195). Discussing written scenarios in the form of intercultural critical incidents, therefore, was seen as the most valuable means to collect data across cultures, and at the same time assuring comparability of findings across the focus groups. Since participants of all three focus groups discussed the same scenarios, findings and participants’ statements were easily comparable across the focus groups, and culturally specific differences or similarities became apparent.

Moreover, utilizing critical incidents as the strategy to collect data enables replication of this research project, which is critical for credibility. The technique of using scenarios in the form of critical incidents allows for repeatability of the research, as the same scenario can be used again, and under the same conditions. Since reliability is often discussed as low in qualitative research (Bryman, 2008), this study offers a valuable means of collecting qualitative data in the field of intercultural communication, where social settings and context is seen as crucial, however, often difficult to capture, and thus, difficult to test and replicate. Utilizing scenarios, therefore, allows for taking contextual factors in situational descriptions into account (Martinez Flor, 2004; McAllister et al., 2006), which is seen as crucial in the field of intercultural communication research, as well as for the assessment of trust, and hence, is essential for this study.

Since scenarios are commonly criticized for being too short and not providing enough context and background information on the given situation, this study focused on modifying scenarios to an appropriate length, providing more background information, and a sufficient context to reduce the likelihood for misunderstandings. Enormous time and effort was put into researching, creating, and modifying the

scenarios for the focus groups, as they were at the heart of this research project, and crucial for the success of this study.

The three scenarios

The discussion of the scenarios represents the main source of data collection for this research project as it was the purpose of the focus group discussions to gain insights into participants' beliefs and underlying culturally determined assumptions and values. Therefore, discussing participants' thoughts and perceptions of the critical incidents was at the heart of this research project in order to identify how and why participants' underlying cultural values and beliefs influence participants' perception of another person's trustworthiness, in regard to the degree of direct or indirect communication used in the scenarios. Participants were asked to comment on the communication behavior of all parties represented in the scenarios and were encouraged to contribute with personal experiences.

The cultures represented in the written critical incidents were the German and Chinese cultures, in keeping with the focus groups participants' cultures. The video scene though, represented an intercultural communication incident between a U.S. manager and a Chinese employee. However, for the purpose of identifying cultural differences in communication styles, having an U.S. citizen representing one of the characters in the video scene was not seen as having a negative impact on the outcome.

The careful modification of the critical incidents and the associated questions was experienced to be very time consuming. However, since the outcome and the success of this study were highly dependent on the suitability of the scenarios and the associated questions, developing appropriate scenarios and questions was seen as critical.

Three scenarios were discussed by each focus group in this study, all three focus groups were structured in the same way, and all three scenarios were discussed in the same order. The first scenario to discuss was a DVD scene, followed by two written scenarios. The two written critical incidents were adapted by the researcher from existing material, and modified for the specific needs of this research project in order to generate the desired outcome.

The first critical incident, the DVD scene, was a short extract from a DVD on intercultural communication (Schrack, 2004), showing an intercultural

communication incident between an U.S. manager and an Asian employee in an office environment. This video clip was utilized to introduce participants to the topic of intercultural communication and dedicated questions were based on participants' thoughts and perceptions of the characters' communication styles.

For a better understanding of this research project, the three scenarios are presented below.

Scenario one, transcribed by the researcher:

Table 2: Scenario one

Manager:	"Mrs. Yi, I'm glad you are here. Have you seen the new advertisement report?"
Employee:	"Yes."
Manager:	"Mrs. Yi, we read it last night, it is a disaster! Who created this document?"
Employee:	"Actually we all put time and effort and thought to it."
Manager:	"I was told that Joe Hugh authored this document."
Employee:	"Well, we all did it together and if you're not happy, I'll be glad to talk to the team."
Manager:	"But didn't it come from Joe Hugh's office?"
Employee:	"We always try to do things together."
Manager:	"I just want to find out who's responsible for this and correct the problem."
Employee:	"OK, we'll get back to you in about 15 minutes. I'll get back to you."
Manager:	"Thank you."

The second scenario was a written scenario, developed by transcribing and adapting a scene from a teaching and training video on intercultural communication between China and the West (Working with China, n. d.). The video scene was utilized as a base for the critical incident to ensure a culturally authentic Chinese communication style. Although the video scene was slightly adapted to meet the needs of this research project, the Chinese communication style was not changed. However, it needs to be mentioned that the video scenes are not based on authentic shootings of a Chinese-Western negotiation, but rather based on a script written with the purpose of teaching.

Scenario two:

After prior discussions and negotiations, managers from the German AB Corporation travelled to Beijing to meet with the Chinese XY Corporation to negotiate final details of their joint venture.

The German manager Mr. Meier: “I understand that we, AB Corporation, will provide capital and expertise, and you, XY, will provide equipment and facilities. With a successful joint venture like this we can quickly create an extremely economically productive factory. We need to negotiate an equally fair management structure and clarify equity issues though. A fast decision would be much appreciated from our side, since time is money. As the proposal we sent you last month includes all details, you should have had enough time to get your lawyers to check everything. And I think we should be ready to close the deal by the end of the week.”

The Chinese managers stick their heads together and Mr. Li finally replies: “We understand your interest in selling your product in China. Your company is big; you make up to US \$ 500 million a year. But you just started doing business in China and the way we do business here is different from the Western way. We very much appreciate your effort and the work you have done already but we would like to spend more time with you before we can make any decisions. We would much appreciate it, if your CEO Mr. Schmidt would come visit us within the next few months. So we can get to know each other better.”

The German managers look slightly confused. Mr. Meier replies: “Mr. Schmidt will be happy to come visit you within the next few months after we closed the deal. From our side, putting such big money into this joint venture should be enough a sign of trust to you. Since all relevant information is readily available now, we should be able to come to an agreement this week. I’m confident that our relationship will grow and become stronger over the coming years.”

Table 3: Scenario two

The third scenario was developed by adapting a critical incident from Cushner and Brislin (1996)¹⁰. The scenario was seen as ideal to discuss differences in culture specific communication styles and discover differences in the interpretation of meaning of the message. The piloted critical incident, thus, was only modified slightly, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Scenario three:

¹⁰ The original scenario modified for this study is Cushner and Brislin’s (1996) scenario number 69, p. 163. See appendix for a copy the original scenario.

Dr. Xuang Xi, who worked at a large university in Beijing, China, was on a study tour in Germany when he contacted Dr. Roland Müller, who was affiliated with Berlin University in Berlin, Germany.

Dr. Xi invited Dr. Müller to come to China for 2 months to teach and give seminars on his very specific research topic, with special attention to using data sets available in China. Dr. Müller responded, "I'm interested, but I have to check the invitation with my university here in Berlin. My university just received a grant that frees me from any teaching responsibilities for 3 years, and that's great because I can devote full time to research and writing. But I don't know the details of what that grant allows, for instance, time away from Berlin to go to China as well as a more teaching-oriented than research-oriented 2 months in China. So I'll check with the administrators here to get their approval." Dr. Müller and Dr. Xi did not hear from each other again.

Table 4: Scenario three

Developing the focus group questions

Creating the guideline questions for the focus groups, in accordance with the scenarios, was central to this research project and crucial for the success of this research project.¹¹ Hence, careful attention was given to the development and modification of the focus group questions. A review of a variety of studies on trust and intercultural communication research, using similar methods to collect data, was helpful to create a first draft of focus group questions.¹² The final guideline questions for the focus groups resulted from ongoing consultation with the researcher's supervisors, as well as feedback from the pilot participants.

The same guideline questions were used for all three focus groups and it was intended to stay close to the questions in order to allow for comparability of participants' responses across the focus groups. However, since the questions were intended to be a guideline, not all questions were asked in each focus group, as some participants provided the requested information before the questions were asked, and questions were not asked in the same order for each focus group.

The questions about the first scenario only focused on participants' perceptions of the communication styles used by the characters in the DVD scene. For

¹¹ See appendix for the guideline of questions.

¹² Studies utilized to develop a first draft of focus group questions were Liu and Wang (2010), Richardson and Smith (2007), Singelis and Brown (1995), Tanaka and Bell (1996), Msanjila and Afsarmanesh (2008), Nishishiba and Ritchie (2000), and Nelson, Al Batal, and El Bakary (2002).

instance the question “How would you describe the manager’s communication style?” was targeted towards identifying participants’ own perceptions and definitions of the communication style. Questions such as “Do you think the manager’s behavior was appropriate?”, and “Would you feel insulted by the manager’s communication style?” were utilized to gain a deeper understanding into participants’ culturally determined points of view. Moreover, questions were asked to reveal what specific elements of the communication style influence participants’ perceptions. For instance “What exactly did you like or not like about the manager’s communication style?”. In addition, one question was targeted towards preferences of participants for a rather direct or rather indirect communication style. No questions on the perception of trust were asked for the first scenario though.

Questions on scenario two and three aimed at identifying whether or not, and how, and why a direct communication style influences participants’ perceptions of another person’s trustworthiness. Therefore, both written scenarios started off with questions requiring a definition of the communication styles from the participants, in order to determine how participants perceive the communication styles. Following questions such as “What is the message, what do you think they are trying to say/communicate? How would you interpret their message? Why do you think they are communicating in this way?” for the second scenario, and “How would you in this situation interpret Dr. Mueller’s response/message?” and “Do you think Dr. Mueller communicated a different message than what he expressed in words?” for the third scenario were targeted towards discovering participants underlying assumptions about Hall’s (1977) high- and low-context communication dimension.

Afterwards questions were asked to identify what elements in general, and of the characters communication style in particular, were considered to be decisive for participants’ perception of honesty and trustworthiness of the other party. For example, the questions “What would your assessment of trust or trustworthiness be based on? Does the response (way of communication) have an influence on your assessment/decision?” were asked for scenario two and three.

Further questions were asked to reveal whether or not participants perceive a direct communication style to indicate openness and honesty, and whether or not participants perceive openness and honesty to be important for their assessment of another person’s trustworthiness. Since a person’s willingness to trust another person is discussed in literature as crucial for the establishment of trust, questions such as

“Does the message/response influence your willingness to trust Dr. Mueller, as to his availability? Or influence whether or not you would consider Dr. Mueller as trustworthy?” were asked for the third scenario.

In order to evaluate the significance of the communication style, the following questions were included in the guideline questions for the second scenario: “Would you start a serious business relationship with the Germans/Chinese? Why, why not? Does their communication style make you more or less interested in working with the German/Chinese Corporation? Or does it not matter (at all)?”.

Group effect of focus groups

The group effect of focus groups is of particular importance for this research project since the group effect leads to a reinforcement of participant’s culture by enhancing culturally determined perspectives and perceptions, therefore, outbalances or minimizes individual’s personal preferences within the group (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Bryman, 2008). Bryman (2008) defines the focus group method broadly as “... an interview with several people on a specific topic or issue” (p. 473), usually involving at least four interviewees. The author, furthermore, points out that the focus group method allows the researcher to combine a focused interview with elements of interaction between group members (Bryman, 2008). The key idea of the method is to emphasize in the questioning “... on a particular fairly tight defined topic; and the accent is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning” (Bryman, 2008, p. 474).

The focus group is a valuable data collection method since group interactions and discussions provide a deeper insight of participants’ opinions on the topic, as group discussion encourages participants to contribute and voice their own thoughts (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The group dynamics of the focus groups in this research project led to vital and in-depths discussions on the topic, providing the researcher with most useful insights into participants’ thoughts and underlying values and beliefs. Focus groups, as opposed to group interviews, have been used in this research project, as focus groups are discussed as having a stronger focus on the specific topic than group interviews do (Bryman, 2008). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) discuss the group effect as the major reason for the use of focus groups, since participants are stimulated by the expression of ideas and experiences of other group members. Since the focus group has become a popular stand-alone research method for examining

how people in conjunction with one another interpret phenomena and collectively construct meaning around it (Bryman, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), the focus group interview was chosen as the ideal data collection method for this study.

A relatively unstructured or semi-structured setting, as opposed to a structured one-to-one interview, allows for the emergence and therefore gathering of views and perceptions of participants (Bryman, 2008), which is of particular importance for this research project, since this structure enables culturally specific themes to emerge from within the focus groups. Therefore, allowing participants to contribute their own perspectives facilitates the development of cultural specific ideas and themes, which is essential for culturally specific sense-making of phenomena, and the interpretation and analysis of the gathered data in the end.

Using open-ended, semi-structured questions as a guideline for the focus group discussion allows for more flexibility during the focus group interviews, as follow up questions can be asked in order to probe unexpected issues and move into uncharted areas (Reinard, 1998). Immediate feedback and the opportunity to catch mistakes and misunderstandings while they emerge are seen as additional advantages of using focus groups as a data collection method.

Disadvantages of utilizing focus groups as a means of data collection, on the contrary, are discussed in the literature as having a low generalizability to the entire population, since participants are not selected randomly. However, it can be argued that qualitative research is less concerned with the representativeness of a population, but rather with generalizing findings to theory (Bryman, 2008). Bryman (2008) in this regard points out that "... it is the quality of theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalizations" (p. 392). Moreover, 'no-shows' of participants on the day of the focus group are discussed as a major problem of focus groups, and hence, over-recruiting is often recommended to minimize the negative effects that might result for the research project (Bryman, 2008).

As participants typically have something in common to be participants for a focus group on a specific topic, the sampling process is affected by the topic, and participants' background plays a crucial role for the selection process. Since this research project focuses on culturally determined communication styles, participants were selected due to their cultural heritage. Business students and students of business related study areas were chosen for this study to assure the link to a business

environment, and a wider age range of participants allows for a broader level of experience, positively contributing to a wider range of views, whilst sharing a common cultural background.

Group size and composition

An appropriate group size for a focus group is typically discussed to be five to twelve participants (Bryman, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Keyton, 2006; Reinard, 1998). Smaller numbers allow for a more in-depths focus group interview and are most suitable for complex topics, whereas a larger number is recommended when involvement with the topic is anticipated to be low or when various brief suggestions are the desired outcome. Due to the complex nature of the topic of this study, a rather small number of six participants per focus groups was chosen, allowing for an in-depth discussion of the topic (Bryman, 2008). According to Bryman (2008), who compares several studies in regard to their group size of the focus groups, even a smaller number of four participants per focus groups can be seen as appropriate, in particular when the topic is complex and an in-depth discussion is desired. Female as well as male students were chosen to represent the sample, with an aim for an equal representation of both sexes, in order to avoid a gender specific outcome. As mentioned earlier, business students and students from business related study areas were selected to assure an understanding by participants of the business world, with an aim for a wider age range allowing for capturing a broad range of life and work experience.

The three focus groups for this research project

The focus groups for this research project were held in the form of a controlled group discussion with open-ended, semi-structured questions to guide the discussion. Follow up questions occurred during the discussion, in order to provide deeper insight into participants' feelings and experiences, and were helpful in tracing new topics and ideas (Reinard, 1998). The open-ended, semi-structured format of the questions allowed for flexibility, and enabled the investigation of unexpected issues as well as the provision of immediate feedback. Moreover, follow up questions enabled the gathering of more information about unforeseen areas, and facilitated the clarification of misunderstandings immediately. Although follow up questions emerged from the discussion, remaining close to the guideline questions was seen as important in order

to ensure comparability of findings across the focus groups. Since comparing culturally specific perceptions, viewpoints and concepts of the participants was at the heart of this research project, ensuring the comparability of the findings across the focus groups was crucial for the success of this study.

Profile of the focus group participants

The focus group participants were students from postgraduate as well as undergraduate business studies and business related studies of a large metropolitan institute of technology in New Zealand. In order to capture rich and in-depth data, the focus groups in this study consisted of small numbers of participants.

The table below shows the composition of the three focus groups:

Focus group	A (Germany)	B (China)	C (New Zealand)
Participants in total	6	4	4
Male participants	2	4	2
Female participants	4	/	2
Undergraduate students of Business studies	1	2	3
Postgraduate students of Business studies	/	2	/
Postgraduate students of Business-related studies	3	/	/
Recently graduated students of business-related studies	2	/	1
No-shows	/	2	1

Table 5: Composition of focus groups

All German participants were born in Germany and had spent different amounts of time in New Zealand by the date the focus group took place, and all Chinese participants were born in China and had spent different amounts of time in New Zealand by the date the focus group took place. All German and Chinese participants were fluent in English as a second language. Participants of the New

Zealand focus group were all native English speakers, born and raised in New Zealand.

Although it was aimed for six to eight participants per focus group, low numbers of prospects, last minute cancellations, and the issue of ‘no-shows’ on the day resulted in four participants for the Chinese and New Zealand focus group. Four participants are a relatively low number for a focus group interview, however, Bryman (2008) suggests that four people is a valid number for an in-depth focus group interview. Validity of this research project, therefore, may have been affected. Although the issue of no-shows is a major problem of focus groups, low numbers allowed for a more in-depth discussion of the topic with the available participants via follow up questions, further discussions, and a stronger focus of collecting rich and in-depth data. It needs to be mentioned though that the reliability of this study might be low due to the low number of participants in the focus groups.

The age range of all participants was 20 to 40 years of age for all three conducted focus groups. It was aimed for a wider age range of participants to capture different levels of life, work, and study experience. Therefore, undergraduate as well as postgraduate volunteer students were included in the research project. Since the main focus of this research project lies in the cultural background of participants and the investigation of how underlying values, beliefs, and norms affect their perceptions, participants were chosen due to their cultural background.

No major language problems occurred before, during, or after the focus groups and minor language issues were discussed, and resolved during the focus group interviews. Chinese and German participants were partly international students and partly New Zealand residents. The mix of international students, who had spent a relatively short time abroad, and residents, with some of whom had spent up to fifteen years in New Zealand, provided this research project with a most valuable insight view of participants’ cultural points of view. Discussing culturally specific perceptions and viewpoints with individuals, who all shared the same culture, but had spent different amounts of time abroad, enabled the researcher to uncover similarities and differences in deeply rooted cultural values and beliefs of participants.

Sampling – recruitment process

Students were recruited at a large metropolitan institute of technology in New Zealand. All participants were volunteer students, recruited over a period of one month. A self-selected, convenience sampling method was applied to recruit students for the sample in his study. The sample was self-selected since students chose whether or not to contact the researcher and take part in the research project. It was a ‘convenience sample’ as students from the same institute were chosen as participants, owing to their availability. In addition, the snowball sampling method was used when students were asked to further recruit other students they knew.

The recruitment process involved the distribution of flyers and posters, as well as class visits, online advertisements, and snow-ball sampling. Posters and flyers informed prospects about the research project, the topic, location, date and timeline, and provided the researcher’s contact details. Posters were publicized throughout the institute, with particular focus on the business studies area. Online advertisement was placed on the institute’s students’ association homepage and emails from the institute’s international office were sent out to German and Chinese students. The advertisement as well as the email informed prospects about the research project, dates, location, incentives, and asked them to participate.

Moreover, flyers were distributed to students after business lectures, and business lecturers of undergraduate as well as postgraduate courses were contacted and asked for class visits in order to recruit students. During the class visits students were informed about the research project and asked to participate on a volunteering base. Flyers were distributed to interested students. Students were encouraged to participate with the incentive of enhancing their personal expertise and knowledge on the topic, as well as their knowledge and experience of conducting research in practice. Moreover, light refreshments and free drinks were offered during the focus groups to reimburse participants for their time and effort.

Involving postgraduate students in the research project was experienced to be relatively easier than recruiting undergraduate students. This can be explained on the grounds that postgraduate students appeared to be interested in conducting research, and therefore enhancing their own experience and expertise in the field of research, as they are required to conduct a research project for their degree. Hence, most postgraduate students perceived the chance to take part in a postgraduate research

project as an excellent opportunity to experience research at first hand. The incentive of enhancing individual's expertise and knowledge was seen to engage a low number of undergraduate students to participate. It was found that talking one-to-one to students and informing them about the research project was the most effective way of recruiting research participants.

New Zealand has been chosen as a contrast group in order to compare research findings to a third culture. In addition, New Zealand has been chosen since domestic students are easier to recruit since the research is conducted in New Zealand.

Contacting and briefing of participants

Ongoing communication between the researcher and the focus group participants was developed as soon as contact details were received. Suitable dates for all three focus groups were scheduled via email. Moreover, the two written critical incidents were sent to the participants at least 48 hours before the focus groups took place, in order to give participants the possibility to become familiar with the scenarios. This was seen as important for the German and Chinese participants in particular, as the scenarios were in English and English is not their mother tongue. Emailing the scenarios in advance, hence, provided participants with the opportunity to get familiar with eventually unknown terms and words, and allowed for a reduction of misunderstandings during the focus group interview. Furthermore, the email was intended as a reminder of the focus group day, and also provided the location and time of the focus group.

Instructing focus group participants

All participants were asked to read the information sheet and read and sign a consent form before the focus groups started.¹³ All participants gave their consent to be audio-taped during the focus group interview and the audio records of the focus groups were transcribed in the days after the focus groups. The transcription of the focus group interviews was experienced as quite difficult in parts, as participants happened to talk at the same time sometimes, which complicated the correct understanding of what was said by each individual. In addition, linguistic difficulties made the transcription of the focus groups more complex and resulted in a longer time span than expected.

¹³ See appendix for information sheet and an exemplary consent form.

In the beginning of each focus group, participants introduced themselves to the group, and the topic, and the structure of the focus group was outlined. Participants were instructed to answer from their own (cultural) point of view, not putting themselves in the position of a member of another culture. No mention was made of the topic of directness, as the pilot revealed a strong focus of participants on this element. Participants were informed that the topic of the research project is intercultural communication and its influence on trust. The words directness and indirectness were not mentioned during the introduction phase as the pilot revealed a strong focus of participants on these elements, not reflecting on other elements influencing their perceptions. Likewise, the pilot revealed that participants were guided too much into one direction, not giving them the chance to elaborate on their own perceptions. Hence, in order to gather participants' individual ideas and perceptions on the given scenarios, and to allow for a detection of culturally specific concepts by giving participants the opportunity to reflect on their own ideas, no mentioning of the word directness was made.

The careful planning of the focus groups and the thoroughly preparation of the guideline-questions was seen as central for this study in order to provide a solid outcome and was experienced as extremely helpful for conducting the focus groups. The pilot, as well as ongoing consultation with supervisors, assisted the refinement of the focus group structure, scenarios, and questions.

Difficulties experienced

A variety of difficulties occurred during the recruiting process and caused a rather low number of participants for the focus groups in the end. A number of six to eight participants per focus group was anticipated, however, different circumstances resulted in six participants for the German focus group, and four participants for the Chinese and New Zealand focus group. Although the focus groups were originally scheduled for an earlier point in time, difficulties recruiting an appropriate number of students, in combination with mid-semester-break times, followed by study and exam periods caused delays in the timeframe and resulted in a rescheduling of the focus groups. In addition, scheduling the day and time for each focus group was experienced as more complicated as expected, since undergraduate and postgraduate students had different timetables for exams and assignment due dates. Moreover, some participants who agreed to participate left the country immediately after they

finished their course, while other students were still studying. Different exam dates and assignment due dates, therefore, caused difficulties in coordinating availability dates and scheduling focus group dates. A significant number of German and Chinese students left New Zealand to return to their home countries after their courses had finished. Likewise, some students started working full time immediately after finishing their exams, hence, were only available after hours, whereas other students were only available during the day due to family commitments. The major difficulty of the recruitment process of this study can be seen in engaging students to participate, in combination with scheduling focus group dates that suit all participants. The afore mentioned aspects in combination with the researcher's lack of experience in conducting research and not taking no-shows of participants seriously enough, resulted in rather low numbers of participant for the focus groups.

On reflection, the focus group design, the structure, and the questions were suitable for this research project. However, questions regarding participants' rating of the scenarios' characters' trustworthiness and honesty on a scale revealed to be rather less useful. Since the rating on the scale was understood differently by all participants, and hence caused confusion, the scale will not be further discussed in this research project.

Another issue that occurred during the Chinese focus group was the Chinese participants' interpretation of the meaning of a direct and indirect message for the third scenario. This issue will be further illustrated in the findings chapter, and further discussed and analyzed in the discussion chapter.

Analysis

The data analysis started immediately after the focus groups were conducted, and was continued until the end of the research project. Kristjansdottir (2009) points out that rethinking and reflecting about qualitative data is essential for analyzing qualitative data. In order to grasp the complexity of participants' lived experiences, 're-thinking', 're-flecting', 're-cognizing' results in rewriting "[t]o be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld ..." (van Manen, 1997, p. 131). Challenges to qualitative data analysis in general, and for this research project in particular, can be reported from the non-existence of a preconceived theoretical framework (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

In order to condense the huge amount of data gathered from the focus groups, data was reduced, organized, and themes and concepts were identified and clustered (Bryman, 2008; Collis & Hussey, 2003). The crux of the matter for qualitative research, and hence, for the outcome of this research project, was how appropriately the data is grouped, themes and categories identified, and data analyzed accordingly.

A first level analysis takes place in the findings chapter and focus group interviews are coded for units of meaning. Color coding of themes, key words, and recurring words in the focus group transcripts assisted in identifying themes, and open coding¹⁴ lead to the identification of emerging themes and concepts from each focus group in the findings chapter. For instance, due to a closer examination of the focus group transcripts, a strong focus of participants on the themes of politeness and relationships/*guanxi* became apparent.

Axial and selective coding is applied in the discussion chapter, and lead to the identification of causal relationships between themes, categories, and sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Collected data is compared across the three cultures examined in this study, and discussed in the context of the relevant literature. Relationships and connections between the themes and sub-categories are identified and explained, and related to core categories in the end. The discussion chapter validates the relationships between the themes by relating the categories to the literature, and provides explanations based on the comparison of the findings from the focus group discussions to the literature. The discussion and analysis of the findings indicates an interconnectedness of various concepts, such as individualism-collectivism, high- and low-context communication cultures, and their preferences for communication styles, appropriate degrees of politeness, *guanxi*, conceptions of time, and various elements of trust.

Key and sub-categories that are examined in the discussion chapter are the following:

- Hall's (1977) contexting model, and culturally determined preferences for direct or indirect communication styles,
- Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of individualism-collectivism, long-term orientation, and power distance index, and their impact on trust,
- Relationships and the Chinese concept of *guanxi*,

¹⁴ According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), open coding is defines as "[t]he analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data" (p. 101).

- Politeness theory,
- Key elements of trust, such as openness and honesty, participant's willingness to trust,
- Calculus- and identification-based trust as categories of situational trust, and
- Lewis' (2006) concept of LT and HT cultures.

Ethical considerations

As this research project involves humans, ethical considerations were taken into account, and ethical approval was sought and gained from the relevant body. During the recruitment process prospective participants were briefed on the purpose of the project, the research topic, and the structure of the focus group. It was, moreover, noted that participation is purely voluntary.

Focus groups participants were briefed again in the beginning of the focus groups, and all participants read the information sheet, read and signed the consent form, agreed to participate, and gave their consent to be audio-taped during the focus group. Confidentiality was ensured in order to preserve the identity of the participants. Participants' words were treated as a collective response from the focus group, rather than individual responses from participants, as this study focused on cultural specific values and beliefs influencing participants' perceptions, and thus, determining their points of view on the topic.

Due to the cultural diversity of New Zealand, Auckland in particular, New Zealand-born-Europeans were chosen as participants for the New Zealand focus group, in alignment with the Research Ethics Committee requirements for this study. A limitation to New Zealand-born-Europeans as participants was seen as necessary in order to enable an accurate interpretation of culturally sensitive data of the focus group.

No particular topic of this research project was contentious or likely to cause offense, since the research project only focused on intercultural communication patterns. Moreover, participation was purely voluntary and appropriate steps were taken to brief participants in-depth on the topic and the outline of the focus groups in order to avoid cultural insensitivity.

Limitations

Limitations of this research project can be seen in the researcher's cultural background and the chance that data might be interpreted from a German point of reference. However, since every person belongs to a certain culture, objectivity will always be limited in this field of research.

Moreover, the relatively low generalizability due to the small number of focus groups and the small samples causes further limitations. However, as mentioned earlier, this study is explorative in nature and this qualitative study is less concerned with the representativeness of a population, but rather with generalizing findings to theory. In addition, although the sample consists of students which do not represent the general public, using students with a sound knowledge of business studies and with work experience allows for drawing conclusions to a business context and provide indications for recommendations and improvements of intercultural communication behavior. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, this qualitative research project does not aim to "... produce data that can be subjected to statistical procedures that allow generalization to a population ..." (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 122), but rather focuses on "... the social practices and meanings of people in a specific [...] cultural context" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 122).

Validity of this research project, therefore, will not be diminished since using students for this kind of research is common practice, and researcher have used students as research subjects on numerous occasions (for example Richardson & Smith, 2007; McAllister et al., 2006; Arthur, 2001; Hall, De Jong & Steehouder, 2004; Tanaka & Bell, 1996). Moreover, in accordance with Bryman (2008), a small sample of four participants per focus group might be discussed as a mini focus group and its findings are valid.

Reliability of this research project is provided since the written scenarios, as well as the DVD scene, can be utilized again for further studies, allowing for testability and repeatability of the research project. Additionally, the piloting of the focus group structure, the scenarios, and the guideline questions indicates a carefully planned research design and enhances the validity of the research project. This research project, therefore, offers a reliable framework for further research, as the method of using scenarios and the scenarios as such, can easily be utilized for further research in this area. Since reliability is often discussed as an issue in qualitative

research (Bryman, 2008), this study offers a valuable means of collecting qualitative data in the field of intercultural communication, where social settings and context is seen as crucial, however, often difficult to capture and hence difficult to test and replicate. Utilizing scenarios, therefore, allows for taking contextual factors in situational descriptions into account (Martinez Flor, 2004; McAllister et al., 2006), which is seen as crucial in the field of intercultural communication research, as well as for the assessment of trust, and hence, is essential for this study.

Using focus groups as the only means to collect data can be seen as an additional limitation of this research project. However, the focus group has become a popular stand-alone research method (Bryman, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), and likewise, using the critical incident method the single means to collect data has become popular in recent research studies (McAllister et al., 2006; Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Tanaka & Bell, 1996; Sullivan & Peterson, 1982).

In order to minimize the appearance of researcher bias, as many quotes as possible were used from the focus group discussions to allow for a close comparison of participants' words to the relevant literature.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the three focus groups and identifies themes, and concepts which emerged during the data collection process. Findings of each focus group are presented separately in order to provide a culturally specific presentation of findings, and themes. The three scenarios are discussed one at a time and separately for each focus group, followed by an overall presentation and comparison of findings according to the emerging themes across the focus groups.

As many quotes as possible are used in this chapter to indicate the use of participants' original words, and thus diminish the researcher's interpretation of participants words, and allow for a more transparent analysis. Since this chapter presents the findings of the focus group interviews, a first level analysis occurs as emerging themes, topics, and patterns are identified. However, the following discussion chapter discusses the findings and themes in relation to the literature, and draws conclusions.

The aim of this chapter, in addition, is to cluster, and hence reduce the large amount of data gathered during the focus groups in order to make the data more manageable. Themes and topics are presented in the culture and scenario specific parts of this chapter, and a comprehensive comparison of themes of the focus groups is presented at the end of this chapter.

Scenario one

The first scenario was the DVD scene in the format of a video clip. The associated questions focused on the communication style and participants' perceptions of the degree and appropriateness of the direct communication style of the characters represented in the video scene.

Focus group A (Germany)

The German focus group started off with a lively discussion about the inappropriateness of the U.S. manager's communication style. Participants in the German focus group described the communication style of the U.S. manager not only as 'pretty direct' and 'straightforward', but rather as 'unfriendly' and 'aggressive'. Although participants agreed that they generally prefer a direct mode, surprisingly the

degree of directness used by the U.S. manager was perceived by the group as being too direct. Participants, moreover, defined the U.S. manager's communication behavior as 'aggressive', and therefore unprofessional. His behavior was discussed as 'unprofessional' and 'inappropriate' as it was perceived to 'create fear', which was seen as counterproductive for an efficient work environment. Likewise, participants perceived the U.S. manager's communication behavior as 'talking down' to the Chinese employee, putting pressure on her to answer his questions. Participants stressed that "[h]e showed that he has power and that he is in the hierarchy" (Focus group A, p. 1), since he was perceived to be "... really angry and he showed it" (Focus group A, p. 1). Although German participants highlighted the inappropriateness of the U.S. manager's communication style by stating "I think he wouldn't keep his position for very long if he would continue like this" (Focus group A, p. 3), they, nevertheless, pointed out that "... it still happens" (Focus group A, p. 3), and "I had bosses like that and worse and worse!" (Focus group A, p. 3).

The U.S. manager's direct and straightforward communication style was also discussed by the participants as a form of 'old school management', which they said used to be a common communication style in Germany. However, in regard to today's common management practice, the U.S. manager's communication behavior was interpreted as 'rude', and participants agreed that "[i]t seemed he just had a really bad day ..." (Focus group A, p. 3). Likewise, participants pointed out that "... chiefs nowadays would be trying to be more polite and friendly ..." (Focus group A, p. 1). Nevertheless, the straightforward communication approach in this scenario was discussed as "... the usual way in Western cultures" (Focus group A, p. 1), since the U.S. manager's intentions were interpreted as searching, and hence "... pushing for an answer" (Focus group A, p. 1). It was argued that "[t]hey are under time pressure. So it's ok to be straightforward and direct" (Focus group A, p. 2). However, the manager's 'tone' and 'the way' he approached the employee were seen as inappropriate in this scenario, and hence as unprofessional. Participants highlighted that the manager 'used' the employee "... as an outlet for his anger. And that's not professional" (Focus group A, p. 4). Additionally, participants interpreted the manager's straightforward communication style not only as pressuring, but also in a negative way as 'talking down' to the employee. It was highlighted that the manager's style of communication was inappropriate, since it was perceived to create fear, which

was discussed to be ‘counter-productive’ for efficient communication, and hence, for a successful work environment.

Participants in the German focus group, furthermore, generated an intense discussion on the topic of pointing out the responsible person for the job. It was argued that a direct approach is ok, and that “... it’s ok to say it’s a disaster, I don’t have a problem with that. I like people that place their opinion. It’s just the point of pointing the finger to someone that’s responsible I think that’s wrong at that point” (Focus group A, p. 3). Similarly, it was perceived as rather ‘unfair’ and ‘wrong’ that the manager talked to the employee, trying to find a responsible person out of a team. One participant stressed “... it seems to me he is talking bad behind the back of someone else” (Focus group A, p. 2), since he was trying to point out one person in charge instead of talking to the whole team.

Hierarchical structures were discussed by participants as a possible motive for the manager’s pressuring approach to identify the person responsible. It was argued that “... it’s like the food chain, he is giving the pressure to the next person responsible” (Focus group A, p. 2), since “... maybe he’s pressured by someone else, so he needs the results” (Focus group A, p. 2).

Whereas the U.S. manager’s straightforward and direct approach was perceived as rather unprofessional in this scenario, the Asian employee’s rather reserved communication style, on the contrary, was perceived as more professional as “[s]he mentioned it was teamwork, in the first place. So it wasn’t only one person responsible for it” (Focus group A, p. 4). Hence, she “... didn’t point the finger and said it wasn’t me, it was that guy” (Focus group A, p. 4). Participants emphasized that the employee’s response was seen as a rather appropriate and more professional communication behavior, since she referred back to the team, and tried to avoid open criticism and the singling out of one person.

Focus group B (China)

The responses of the Chinese focus group turned out to be slightly more difficult to interpret than findings of the German focus group for the first scenario, due to an initial misunderstanding of the relationship between the characters in the video scenario. Three out of the four Chinese participants considered the Asian woman to be the manager and the U.S. male character to be a customer or client. This misunderstanding arose owing to the fact that the woman was sitting behind her desk,

whereas the man came into her office, standing in front on of her desk. Participants explained that it is common practice in China that managers call their employees into their offices, rather than visiting them in the employee's office. However, after the cultural misunderstanding was resolved, the majority of the participants seemed to be in general agreement with each other.

Overall, the communication style used by the manager in the first scenario was surprisingly described as 'kindly', and as 'normal' communication behavior in a business setting. Participants pointed out that the manager "... slowed down his words, and the speed and the words were clearly. And he was very gentle the way he go to the answer" (Focus group B, p. 1). Therefore, the manager's communication style was interpreted as 'gentle' and 'kindly'. Similarly, participants recognized the employee's office environment as being designed in a Chinese style, and hence, considered the manager's slow and 'gentle' communication approach as a 'local' way to talk to the employee. Participants mentioned that owing to the Asian style of the office, the company would be in an Asian country, and hence, the manager's communication style was interpreted as a kindly and gentle approach to adapt to the local environment, and facilitate a minimization of linguistic difficulties.

It was, moreover, discussed that such a communication style or behavior is 'normal' in today's business settings. Participants pointed out that the manager's communication style in this situation is "... very normal though. Something went wrong and the manager would just talk to you in this way. The way he asks is still polite. He goes right to the point. He doesn't make up a long story, he goes right to the point" (Focus group B, p. 3). The manager's direct approach was perceived as normal, since participants understood his intentions as common business practices. Participants discussed that the manager was "... just trying to asking who is responsible to this and then they would try to fix the problem. Not trying to blame it to someone else" (Focus group B, p. 2). Moreover, since the manager was noticeably from a Western country, participants argued that "... he just wants to get the result immediately" (Focus group B, p. 2), which was considered normal business practice in this situation.

Although the manager's direct communication approach was perceived as 'normal' by the Chinese participants, it was, however, pointed out that in New Zealand this might not be the case. One participant highlighted that "[i]n New Zealand boss never talks to you in this way. Never ever" (Focus group B, p. 4). It was

discussed that in New Zealand, managers communicate “[m]ore nicely. Of course” (Focus group B, p. 4) and rather “[I]like a friend” (Focus group B, p. 4). The difference became even more apparent when one participant stated: “For me if I’m the manager of a company I just like be friendly talk to them. But here, not in China” (Focus group B, p. 4), followed by a rather direct statement: “In China, I won’t do it that way. I would just give them a call come to my office, I need talk to you” (Focus group B, p. 4). It became apparent, that the Chinese participants did not perceive the direct approach as insulting or impolite, but rather as a common business communication style.

Similarly to the German focus group, Chinese participants discussed the situation as including an element of pressure. However, this was discussed from a different angle by the Chinese participants, as they referred back to the fact that the manager came to the employee’s office, which was considered as highly unusual, and hence, creating pressure and fear for the employee. It was noted that “I think this woman maybe is little bit of scared. So the manager comes to employee’s office to complain, this is Oh My God, what did I do? Giving you lots of pressure” (Focus group B, p. 4). As opposed to the German focus group discussion, the Chinese participants did not perceive the manager’s direct communication approach as the cause of the pressure and fear felt by the employee.

Although the majority of participants seemed to be in general agreement with each other, it needs to be mentioned that one participant, who had spent a considerable longer time in New Zealand, hence away from China, held a slightly different perspective on some topics. He, however, recognized that he felt he had spent too much time away from China, and his perspectives and perceptions might have changed over the time. He pointed out that “[t]hat’s why I said I left China for too long” (Focus group B, p. 3). His point of view slightly varied from the others regarding the appropriateness of the manager’s behavior to address the employee. Whereas the other three participants described the manager’s communication style as normal communication behavior, he stated that “I don’t think this is an important way to, ... , or attitude or manner to approach his employee. Na, I don’t think this is right way to find the problem” (Focus group B, p. 2).

Focus group C (New Zealand)

Findings of the New Zealand focus group turned out to be very specific and consistent for the first scenario. All participants interpreted the manager's communication style as 'direct', 'confrontational', and 'very aggressive', which was perceived as 'inappropriate' in this situation. The discussion clearly revealed that the manager's communication behavior was perceived as inappropriate, and participants stressed that "[i]t's not just the fact that it's direct, that's the problem. It's aggressive and insulting" (Focus group C, p. 2), hence, 'impolite'. Although all participants were in complete agreement with regard to the inappropriateness of the manager's communication approach in this scenario, they, nonetheless, indicated that such a direct communication style does occur in New Zealand companies today. One participant stated "I find it not intimidating but offensive, slightly for myself. I would find it offensive and put my back up. But I must agree, that's how some managers do communicate" (Focus group C, p. 1).

Overall, the manager's direct and 'aggressive' communication style was perceived as 'impolite', and participants considered it as inappropriate behavior to "... go straight to the issue" (Focus group C, p. 1) instead of starting off nicely, "[o]r given it some pace to begin with" (Focus group C, p. 1). Although a direct communication style was not completely rejected by the New Zealand participants, much emphasis was placed on being polite while being direct.

Scenario two

The second scenario discussed in the focus groups was the written critical incident of the German – Chinese joint venture negotiation scene. The associated questions for this scenario focused on participants' perceptions on communication styles and their impact on the perception, and development of trust in this critical incident. It needs to be mentioned though that participants of all focus groups perceived this scenario as slightly artificial, and the communication style used by the two parties in the scenario as 'not authentic'. New Zealand participants, therefore, pointed out that "[t]his scenario I could envisioning happening 20 years ago ..." (Focus group C, p. 4), but should not be happening in this way nowadays.

Focus group A (Germany)

The discussion of the German participants in this scenario strongly focused on different expectations and needs of the German and Chinese managers, in order to enable the development of trusting relationships. Participants repeatedly discussed that both parties seemed to be in different stages of the process, having different expectations how to establish trust and assess trustworthiness. Participants pointed out that

[t]hey seem to be in completely different stages of the negotiation. It seems for the Chinese it's just the starting and the Germans are kind of finished with everything and now we can sign off the contract and then we can start working together. They looked up all the facts and they are fine with it. (Focus group A, p. 5)

It was moreover highlighted

[i]t seems like the relationship aspect is less important for the Germans. They are looking for the facts, like the company is so and so big, we looked at the market and whatever. Whereas the Chinese emphasize the relationship aspect, like we have to get to know each other better and then we can decide if we are going to work together. (Focus group A, p. 5)

It became apparent from the discussion that the participants clearly differentiated between the Chinese and German way of conducting business. Whereas the German managers in this scenario were described by the participants as focusing on facts and financial benefits of the deal, participants perceived the Chinese managers as focusing on the relationship aspect of the business deal. It was understood as typical German business behavior to focus on financial, and short term aspects, since "... time is money ..." (Focus group A, p. 5), and "[t]hat's the deal, all about the money" (Focus group A, p. 5). A fast and efficient decision, hence, was considered to be appropriate and common business practice by the German participants.

Likewise, participants discussed the signing of the contract as being placed at different stages of the negotiation process, or rather as having a different meaning for the Chinese and German managers in this scenario. It was explained that

... the signature comes at different stages. So, like for a German, it has to be the first thing in order to secure the relationship, whereas for the Chinese the relationship comes first, and then... Even though everyone knows that they are going to sign, but the official signing is actually not as important. Because it's about the relationship first. (Focus group A, p. 8)

Similarly, the significantly different approaches of the Chinese and German managers were discussed as "... two different points of communication" (Focus group A, p. 7).

Although the Germans' fast approach to closing the business deal was recognized as typical in a German business environment, participants, however, stressed that "... that's German thinking, not Chinese thinking" (Focus group A, p. 5). It was, therefore, considered inappropriate to use the same approach when dealing with China. Participants pointed out: "... I mean we know that, you guys know that in China without knowing the people first they won't talk to you about money or business. So it's just a bad mistake, really. And probably comes across really arrogant and rude" (Focus group A, p. 5).

Likewise, although the Germans' 'direct' communication style was understood as normal, participants pointed out that it might be perceived as "... arrogant and rude" (Focus group A, p. 5), and as "... bossy and pushy" (Focus group A, p. 9) by the Chinese managers. Participants clearly differentiated between the appropriateness of the manager's communication style when dealing with other Germans or dealing with the Chinese. Participants pointed out "... if he writes like that or talks like that with another German CEO they maybe will come together really quickly" (Focus group A, p. 8), and "[h]onestly, I wouldn't have problems with the way he puts it in German. In a German environment I don't think that's, it's not inappropriate. I would say it's really appropriate in a German environment" (Focus group A, p. 9). However, "... with the Chinese it seems like he's trying really to be bossy and pushy" (Focus group A, p. 9). Therefore, the German managers were perceived as "... dictating the plan ..." (Focus group A, p. 8), as they were rushing through the meeting and pushing for answers, signing the contract in particular. Participants, nevertheless, mentioned "... that's the everyday way manager talk to each other in German company environment. That's the way they talk to each other, and even worse" (Focus group A, p. 9).

The discussion in the German focus group revealed a strong emphasis on open and honest communication in regard to the assessment of trustworthiness of the Chinese managers in the scenario. Open communication and the sharing of information were perceived as honest behavior, which was seen as crucial for the establishment of trust by the German participants. Moreover, ‘critical feedback’, and direct, immediate replies to key question were considered essential for a successful collaboration, and for the establishment of a trust among the parties. It was clearly stated that the rather reserved communication style of the Chinese caused suspicion about their true intentions, which was discussed as negatively influencing the German’s willingness to trust the Chinese. Participants highlighted that “[f]rom a German perspective I would say they are less trustworthy because you never know” (Focus group A, p. 11), and “... it seems they can change their mind every time” (Focus group A, p. 11). Since critical feedback and reliable commitments were seen as crucial elements for trusting business relationships, participants pointed out how ‘frustrating’ it can be for Germans not to get the immediate and direct reply they expect. One participant argued “... I wouldn’t trust them. Because everything is still open ...” (Focus group A, p. 13),

[a]nd you don’t get answers of questions you had earlier. I think that’s one of the important things for me. Questions and things you talked about it, but they don’t refer to that. And if I write a letter with things and questions, I want to have answers to all those questions. Even if they say we don’t know now. That’s ok, but they didn’t refer to this. (Focus group A, p. 13)

From a German perspective, therefore, a clear and direct statement was considered essential as it “... equals trustworthy and honest” (Focus group A, p. 19).

The different communication styles used by the German and Chinese managers, moreover, caused a discussion on politeness amongst the participants. Although the Chinese were perceived as “... quite direct as well in saying oh well, you actually don’t understand us ...” (Focus group A, p. 7), it needs to be mentioned, that the Chinese communication style itself was described as ‘quite direct’ for a Chinese, taking into account that the German participants considered the Chinese to be typically rather indirect. Participants argued that it was “... quite direct to say it. You know by saying you don’t know what you’re doing” (Focus group A, p. 10). However, participants agreed that the way how it was said “... sounds quite polite”

(Focus group A, p. 10), and therefore, pointed out that “[t]hey are not as direct as the Germans. They are more polite” (Focus group A, p. 8). Since a direct and straightforward communication approach was seen as normal in a German environment, however, rather inappropriate in a Chinese – German business setting, participants perceived the Chinese communication style as more polite, taking the cultural background of both parties in the scenario into account. Although the German managers were described as ‘bossy’ and ‘authoritative’, participants, nonetheless, explained that the Germans’ direct approach is still seen as polite in a German environment. Participants clarified that “... it’s the German way of being polite. By being direct” (Focus group A, p. 8), and moreover stated that

... in other cultures you tell maybe small lies in order to be polite. Whereas in the German culture you wouldn’t do that. So by saying we need that signed now, it’s actually the German way of being polite by not fluffing around and wasting anyone’s time” (Focus group A, p. 8),

And “[i]nstead concentrating on the business” (Focus group A, p. 8). It was, moreover, noted that the direct approach was used by the German managers due to efficiency reasons, to speed up the process, and get all the information and facts required in order to close the deal. Participants discussed that this communication behavior is “... normal, it’s a polite way of saying it, it’s just a way to get a response. If someone is fluffing around then you know, you just try to be a bit more direct to get a response. It’s not necessary to say to be pushy but just to get a response ...” (Focus group A, p. 9).

Focus group B (China)

The Chinese focus group discussion revealed a strong focus on the relationship aspect for developing business relationships, and on the time frame required for this. Participants perceived the German managers as focusing on “... the market opportunity for economic high profit” (Focus group B, p. 6), and noted “... they focus on the speed and the opportunity...” (Focus group B, p. 5), which was seen as less important for the Chinese participants. Participants confirmed that “... the Chinese manager they want to know each other better than go further to sign the final agreement. it’s normal” (Focus group B, p. 6). Participants clearly pointed out that “... the German managers, they are more focused on the procedure. Step by step. And

the Chinese managers they are focused on the relationship” (Focus group B, p. 6), which was understood as the most obvious difference between the German and the Chinese business practices.

The actual signing of the contract and the contract itself was described as less important for the Chinese participants. It became apparent that personal relationships were seen as crucial for the Chinese participants to establish trusting business relationships, and it was highlighted that “... business is always relationship. You can’t do business without relationship” (Focus group B, p. 11). The importance of social relationships for business deals became evident when participants stated: “... to build a relationship is more worth than to do some lawyer, black white document. Because the relationship is like ..., it’s harder to measure, it’s harder to touch” (Focus group B, p. 8).

However, the Chinese participants strongly differentiated between the common business practice when dealing with other Chinese or dealing with ‘Westerners’. It was explained that “... we in Chinese business want to sign a contract, we need to do some ceremony. Like, to know each other more, know more each other. But if Chinese do [business] with a Western, it’s kind of directly ...” (Focus group B, p. 7). Participants, moreover, pointed out that the given scenario does not reflect the reality appropriately. Although the indirect approach with a strong emphasis on personal relationships for successful business deals was seen as common for business deals conducted in China, participants argued that “... in a real situation, the Chinese would be maybe more eager to finalize this agreement instead of German manager to push it. I think in a real situation it’s opposite” (Focus group B, p. 7). Participants further elaborated that “[i]n China, if you’re a foreigner from the West, in China the local people, the more you have money, input, instead of push ... we are eager to get the money. Input and investment instead of we have to build a relationship first” (Focus group B, p. 7).

Participants discussed the Western fast approach with a strong focus on financial benefits as the ‘formal way’ to conduct business in China, and illustrated “[i]n a formal way we negotiate business, in a formal way, like in the German example. But after the formal we use other way to try to get to know each other” (Focus group B, p. 6). The Chinese formal way of conducting business was seen as only one part of the whole business deal, and more emphasis was placed on the informal, rather personal aspect of conducting business. Participants pointed out that

“... from a Chinese way, if you want to cooperate with a Western company, you should know this company firstly. It depends. You say you have money and equipment, right, but we should know you, your background” (Focus group B, p. 6f.). Knowledge about the prospective business partner was discussed as a key element for starting a successful business relationship.

The concept of *guanxi* was introduced by the Chinese participants, and discussed as crucial for business relationships. Participants pointed out that *guanxi* is difficult to translate and explain in English, as it refers to a whole concept, rather than to a single word. However, it was explained that “... the Chinese focus on the relationship. Like in Chinese we call it Guanxi” (Focus group B, p. 7). It was illustrated by participants that

[t]his relationship includes lots of stuff. And Chinese view the relationship to the honour and trust. They think of the relationship to major honour and trust. And Chinese people deal with other person they think use the relationship can major is that the guy to trustworth. And also to build the relationship, to show myself the whole, it's hard to describe ... (Focus group B, p. 7)

Guanxi, therefore, was described as a requirement for trustworthiness in business relationships. It was discussed that in order to build a relationship, the other party needs to prove their ‘sincerity’ and honesty. Participants pointed out “[w]e need to know you more, how honest you are. How can I trust you? Why do you come here to do something together. I can't (*inaudible*) what kind of person you are” (Focus group B, p. 8), and it was agreed that “... the most important thing is how can I trust you?” (Focus group B, p. 8).

Trust, likewise, was discussed as essential for building business relationships, as participants emphasized a long-term perspective, hence, long-term relationships. Participants argued that the Chinese focus on the ‘future’ and the ‘big picture’, as opposed to the German's ‘quick money’ attitude. Therefore, trust was seen as a key element for the desired long-term relationship, and business relationships were even discussed as friendships. Participants pointed out that “... this relationship, not only business relationship. You need some kind of friendly relationship” (Focus group B, p. 11), “[b]ecause later on it will be useful in the future” (Focus group B, p. 11). The importance of the future aspect was emphasized in this regard, and it was, moreover,

highlighted that “[f]riendship and you take care of each other is more trustful” (Focus group B, p. 11).

Existing (trusting) business relationships and the importance of networking were mentioned by the participants and discussed as helpful for the establishment of new business relationships with prospective partners. This form of networking not only saves time by speeding up the process, but also facilitates the establishment of trust amongst the parties. Participants explained

[t]he easier way for people, somebody introduced me to some guy to do business with and they have already business relationship with that other guy, it means that he’s trustful, trustworthy. And then maybe it takes less time to know his background because of the background from my friend. (Focus group B, p. 12)

Likewise, participants discussed the meaning of social activities for conducting business deals in regard to establishing relationships. Emphasis was placed on social activities in order to shorten the timeframe to conduct business, and facilitating the development of trust among parties. Participants pointed out that “... in China accept business we would focus on ... we have dinner together maybe, get more drinking, we check everything out between people” (Focus group B, p. 11). The significance of the social aspect of business relationships became apparent as participants agreed “[y]es, we focus more on this kind of things” (Focus group B, p. 11).

In regard to the communication style used by the German managers in this scenario, the Chinese participants noted that they ‘accept’ the Germans’ direct approach, however, the Germans’ directness was perceived as slightly ‘too rude’ when dealing with the Chinese. The Germans’ approach was accepted in the given situation of the German-Chinese context, however, participants pointed out that in a Chinese environment, the German managers’ communication style would have been “[k]ind of too rude. Because I can feel the pressure. Not rude I mean, I can feel the pressure and from the pressure I maybe think little bit rude” (Focus group B, p. 9). It was, furthermore, highlighted that the “... Chinese don’t like direct” (Focus group B, p. 9), “... because totally you can see what they want and not. But for Chinese talking you need to go back to think about it” (Focus group B, p. 9). Nevertheless, Chinese

participants did not make any comments on whether or not the communication style of the managers in the second scenario impacts their perceptions of trustworthiness.

Focus group C (New Zealand)

Participants of the New Zealand focus group pointed out what became apparent from the German and Chinese focus group. The New Zealand participants discussed the key differences between the Chinese and the German, or rather Western, business approach as follows:

... it's just the Western way of doing business. We like to get things done straight away because time is money, and we can back things up ... by putting good contracts behind us. As opposed to the Chinese who like to, for example, go out and have dinner first, talk about life and then when you get on, talk about business. And the Chinese, from what I experienced from them, they are all about the relationships first and then business later. (Focus group C, p. 3)

The German, or Western way of doing business was perceived by the participants as 'quite normal', and the signing of the contract was discussed as "... just a formality and all decisions have actually been made" (Focus group C, p. 3) already. The New Zealand participants saw themselves sitting between the Chinese and German business styles, and stated they generally see themselves "[p]robably more towards the German way of ..., or the German situation here" (Focus group C, p. 3), as "[y]ou rely on your lawyers and your contracts to protect you rather than solid personal relationships ..." (Focus group C, p. 3). However, participants pointed out that New Zealanders "... would be slightly less direct than the Germans and we would have an aspect of getting to know the person. Some sort of social interaction before we sign that deal. But certainly not like the Chinese" (Focus group C, p. 3).

The German managers' direct communication approach was perceived by the New Zealand participants as resulting in a trustworthy picture of the German managers. Participants explained that the German managers' directness reflects their honesty, which was seen as important for the establishment of trust. It was highlighted that "I think the Germans are being honest, because they are direct" (Focus group C, p. 4). The direct approach, moreover, was perceived as trustworthy, since it was very 'transparent', and 'clear' to the participants "... how he feels, [and] what they want"

(Focus group C, p. 5). Furthermore, pointing out that “[h]e’s very up front with what he wants” (Focus group C, p. 5), stated in an all-encompassing document.

Although participants noted that New Zealanders would generally be slightly less direct than the German managers in this scenario, they, however, mentioned that they prefer a direct communication style overall. Therefore, participants pointed out that the Chinese ‘ambiguity’, and their ‘meandering’ communication style can be quite ‘frustrating’ for New Zealanders, since “... I want answers and I would try to push for time lines and deadlines. And trying to get at least some fixed deadlines. So I’m not left completely with nothing” (Focus group C, p. 7).

Although participants favored a direct and open communication approach, they, nevertheless, acknowledged that the Chinese approach refers to “...a completely different way of doing things” (Focus group C, p. 4). The German managers’ direct approach in this scenario, therefore, was discussed as rather inappropriate in this Chinese – German environment. The Chinese communication approach, on the other hand, was perceived by the participants as ‘indirect’ and ‘subtle’, and it was pointed out that “[i]t’s obviously designed not to offend. It’s designed to be inoffensive ...” (Focus group C, p. 4), and hence polite. Although the politeness of the Chinese was appreciated, participants stressed that their meandering communication approach demands a higher level of interpretation from the other party, causing more confusion, and thus ambiguity about their actual intentions. Hence, it was mentioned that with “[t]he Chinese, you could imply that they are trying to hold something back ...” (Focus group C, p. 4). However, participants stressed that “... it’s just the way they do business. If anyone is holding something back I would have to, personally, say the Chinese. But in saying that, that’s just the way they do business” (Focus group C, p. 4).

Overall, the German managers were perceived to be more trustworthy than the Chinese managers in this scenario, due to the Germans’ very clear and transparent communication style, as well as the Germans’ general reputation for being reliable. In addition, previous personal experience or cultural stereotyping was mentioned by the participants to account for their assessment of the trustworthiness of the German managers in this scenario. Participants argued that “[p]ersonally, I trust the Germans more” (Focus group C, p. 6), as “[t]hey do exactly what they say they do, due to the nature of the contract” (Focus group C, p. 6). However, it was pointed out that nothing in the Chinese managers communication style “... would suggest impropriety

... I would just instinctively be more cautious dealing with the Chinese than Germans” (Focus group C, p. 6). Participants, nonetheless, discussed they “... would give them both a fair, equal chance. And judge it on the individual case ...” (Focus group C, p. 7).

In regard to the assessment of another persons’ trustworthiness, all participants agreed on the importance of knowledge and research prior to making a decision. Similarly, participants mentioned they “... would instinctively be more wary of the Chinese, ... because the culture is so different, so foreign to me than say German culture. And it would just come down to, you always got to be more cautious of the unknown” (Focus group C, p. 8).

Scenario three

Scenario three was the written critical incident on a German – Chinese communication incident between two professors, resulting in a misunderstanding, and hence a breakdown in communication between the two parties. The associated questions for the third scenario, similarly to the second scenario, focused on participants’ perceptions of the German professor’s honesty and trustworthiness in regard to his communication style.

Focus group A (Germany)

The discussion of the third scenario clearly revealed a gender specific interpretation of the German professor’s communication style by the German participants. Whereas the two male participants interpreted the German professor’s reply as an indirect ‘no’, hence as a rejection of the invitation, the four female participants, in contrast, interpret the reply as a direct ‘yes’, and as a clear statement of facts.

All four female participants agreed that the German professor’s reply is “... typical German and he just wants to make everything sure” (Focus group A, p. 21). Moreover, pointing out “... every single detail ...” (Focus group A, p. 21), and providing “... an explanation why he can’t say yes straight away” (Focus group A, p. 21) were seen as typical German characteristics, and understood by the female participants as accounting for an honest answer, resulting in a trustworthy perception of the German professor. The female participants argued that the long, elaborate, and detailed explanation of the German professor resulted in an even more direct and clear

statement of his availability. It was stated that the German professor's reply "... can't be more direct ..." (Focus group A, p. 22),

... because he gives the explanation. And that's the German way. You have a certain way of doing things and that's the way you do it, and he explains exactly what steps he has to take to get an appropriate answer for Dr. Xi.
(Focus group A, p. 22)

Likewise, following the rules by checking with the institution was seen as appropriate by the female participants, and discussed as typical German behavior. The female participants highlighted that the German professor is 'very trustworthy' "[b]ecause of the detail and the explanation" (Focus group A, p. 24) he provides to Dr. Xi, and moreover pointed out that "... it's too detailed to say he isn't interested and just made it up. Because he's really giving the facts" (Focus group A, p. 24). It was explained that "... giving details that can be checked ..." (Focus group A, p. 24) by another party, further contributed to a trustworthy perception of the German professor in this scenario.

The two male participants, on the contrary, perceived the long and elaborate reply of the German professor as 'too long', and interpreted the answers as "[v]ery clearly not interested" (Focus group A, p. 21). The male participants argued that the German professor "... is talking so much around ..." (Focus group A, p. 23), uses the word 'but' too often, and seems to be "... so completely unenthusiastic about the idea" (Focus group A, p. 23) of teaching in China, that they even described the detailed reply as 'suspicious'. However, one male participant pointed out that "... I wouldn't think he's not trustworthy, I just think he has a very friendly way of saying that he's not interested" (Focus group A, p. 24).

On a scale from one to seven, with one being completely dishonest, and seven being completely honest, all four female participants ranked the German professor as a seven, hence, identified him as completely trustworthy due to the way he responded to Dr. Xi. The two male participants, on the contrary, ranked the German professor as a two, assessing him as 'not trustworthy' due to the way he responded to Dr. Xi in this scenario. It was highlighted by the two male participants that the German professor's response completely lacked enthusiasm, which was understood as "... the important thing" (Focus group A, p. 24). The female participants, however, counter-argued that "... a German really isn't a kind of outgoing personality" (Focus group A, p. 25), and

therefore interpreted his behavior as “... very polite to keep it down ...” (Focus group A, p. 25), in a business environment in particular. The professor’s missing enthusiasm was moreover discussed by the female participants as a strategy to avoid disappointment in case he will not grant approval from his institution.

Similarly to earlier discussions in this chapter, all German participants considered the German professor trustworthy, due to his German heritage. It was noted that “[b]ecause he is German I really would trust him” (Focus group A, p. 24).

Focus group B (China)

The discussion of the Chinese participants revealed different points of view in the interpretation of the German professor’s response. Whereas one participant clearly understood the German professor’s message as an indirect refusal of the Chinese professor’s invitation, the other three participants understood the German professor’s message as a direct statement. However, two out of the three participants who declared the German response as a direct statement also pointed out that they interpreted the message as “[h]e tries to say I don’t want to go” (Focus group B, p. 13), which was perceived as an indirect statement by the fourth participant. The German professor’s response was also interpreted as an indirect and polite statement, as “[h]e want to find some excuse to reject” (Focus group B, p. 13), which was interpreted as “... he doesn’t want to go” (Focus group B, p. 13). Although the researcher’s declaration of the German professor’s response as a direct message was intended to represent a clear statement of his availability, meaning he wants to go to China, it became apparent that two Chinese participants understood the message as ‘direct’, as it seemed very clear to them that the response was a polite refusal. The participants pointed out that the German professor’s reply is a direct statement of saying “[h]e doesn’t” (Focus group B, p. 15) want to go to China, and one participant highlighted “[i]f it’s me, I don’t want to go I would say this is very interesting but I have blah blah blah...” (Focus group B, p. 15). Overall, three out of the four Chinese participants understood the German professor’s message as ‘polite no’.

It was explained that out of respect “[h]e don’t directly says no, I think this is to respect each other” (Focus group B, p. 15), and it was, moreover, highlighted that “[f]or my way this is respect each other. I don’t want to say ‘no’” (Focus group B, p. 15). One participant, however, perceived the German professor’s message as a simple

statement of facts and stated “[m]y understanding is that he is interested but he has blah blah blah...” (Focus group B, p. 15).

It was stressed by the participants that the correct interpretation of the German professor’s reply also “[d]epends on how deep their relationship is” (Focus group B, p. 16). If the two professors were close friends, participants would interpret the German’s message as a direct statement of his availability, whereas if the two professors had no close relationship, the message would have been interpreted as a polite refusal. Whether or not participants consider the German professor to be honest with the Chinese professor with regard to his availability, therefore, was discussed as depending on the relationship as well.

Furthermore, participants pointed out that the culture of the professors needs to be taken into consideration, as the professors’ culture influences the participants’ interpretation of the message. It was highlighted that “[t]his German Dr. speaks like an Asian where you try to be polite. In total there’s no reject, there’s no ‘no’ ...” (Focus group B, p. 14), and “[i]f that says in Chinese someone, it means that you are not really interested” (Focus group B, p. 16). Moreover, participants noted “[i]f the German guy really don’t want to go, they just say no, I got three years contract” (Focus group B, p. 16). Therefore, participants concluded “[m]aybe this German guy had to say the truth, but from the Chinese guy understanding he maybe think it’s an excuse, he maybe don’t want to come” (Focus group B, p. 19).

All Chinese participants considered the German professor to be honest and trustworthy though, and pointed out “I trust what he said” (Focus group B, p. 14) “[b]ecause he told me the truth. Honest to me” (Focus group B, p. 14). Participants, furthermore, perceived the German professor as honest “[b]ecause he tells the Chinese Dr. what are his feeling ...” (Focus group B, p. 14). Although the Chinese participants understood the German professor’s reply as an indirect message, they considered him to be honest and trustworthy. As this chapter only presents the findings of the focus groups, this issue, therefore, will be further discussed and analyzed in the following chapter, the discussion chapter.

Focus group C (New Zealand)

It became apparent from the New Zealand focus group that the majority of participants interpreted the German professor’s response as a polite excuse to reject the Chinese professor’s invitation, or at least to keep his options open, as “... he’s

using it as a possible out” (Focus group C, p. 13). The German professor was considered to be ‘not interested’ in the Chinese professor’s invitation by three out of four participants, however, the details of the grant were perceived as true by all four participants. Three out of the four participants agreed they “... don’t doubt that the details are correct. But anyone who is at that level in an organization like that probably could have made it happen” (Focus group C, p. 10), suggesting the German professor is not interested in the Chinese professor’s invitation. The German professor was understood as “... using an Asian way to save face, to really say he’s not really interested. Because if he was, he wouldn’t have gone in this long, convoluted speech ...” (Focus group C, p. 9). Likewise, participants discussed they “... would definitely say face saving, because he wouldn’t want the Chinese professor to feel offended if he said no, I’m not interested” (Focus group C, p. 10).

It was, furthermore, stated that the German professor’s wording “‘I’m interested, BUT’ ... might be the key here, with what he said. that’s the key, the BUT. It sounds like he doesn’t really want to” (Focus group C, p. 10). One participant, however, argued the German professor is interested, “[b]ecause he says ‘I’m interested’” (Focus group C, p. 10). Nevertheless, the participant recognized “[a]lthough we do have a saying ‘everything before the but means nothing’” (Focus group C, p. 10).

All participants considered the German professor to be honest in regard to the details of the grant, and three participants agreed that the professor ... might be vaguely interested in going, but ... the actual details that he has put about the grant and the process that he has to go through to get approval to do it, I think he’s a hundred percent honest with that. I don’t doubt the details. (Focus group C, p. 12)

However, one participant noted that “... trust is more than honesty” (Focus group C, p. 12), and perceived this scenario as not “... having any bearing or whatsoever on trust” (Focus group C, p. 11).

Last sentence of scenario three

The last sentence of the third scenario led to an extensive discussion amongst all focus group participants, and is therefore discussed next.

The last sentence “Dr. Müller and Dr. Xi did not hear from each other again” caused confusion amongst the German participants, as it was considered rather untypical for a German not to give any feedback or reply. German participant agreed they “... expect the German guy to give feedback. To tell Dr. Xi they approved or they don’t approved. But that doesn’t happen. But that’s what I would assume as the German way, even if it’s a negative answer or reply” (Focus group A, p. 19). The culture of the characters in the scenario, therefore, was considered to be decisive and one German participant pointed out that “... it would make perfect sense if it wasn’t a German but an American” (Focus group A, p. 19). German participants argued that “... for a German that doesn’t make sense. Like a person who doesn’t give any feedback is not trustworthy. In a German context” (Focus group A, p. 26), “[e]specially when it’s a professional relationship. You would expect him to give feedback” (Focus group A, p. 26). Not providing any feedback was perceived as decisive for the German and New Zealand participants to base their assessment of the German professor’s trustworthiness on. One New Zealand participant highlighted that [t]he only way I don’t trust him is because he didn’t get back to him. The fact that they didn’t hear from each other is where it has gone wrong. And obviously he wasn’t interested, because of that fact. (Focus group C, p. 11)

New Zealand participants clearly pointed out that the last sentence was decisive for the majority of participants to consider the German professor not to be interested in the invitation of the Chinese professor. Chinese participants, however, simply stated that the scenario is not finalized yet, and both parties need to follow up on each other, and German participants pointed out that they would consider the German professor to be more trustworthy if the last sentence was ‘Dr. Mueller did not hear from Dr. Xi again’.

A clear distinction became apparent between the German and Chinese participants, as they argued contrary whose turn it is to contact the other party again. Whereas the German participants perceived it to be “... Dr. Mueller’s obligation to contact Dr. Xi ...” (Focus group A, p. 27), Chinese participants, on the contrary, considered it to be Dr. Xi’s turn to contact Dr. Mueller again, as Dr. Xi “... invited him, so you have to show your sincerity” (Focus group B, p. 16), “[s]o he had to follow up” (Focus group B, p. 16), in order to maintain their relationship. Chinese participant, moreover, clearly pointed out that “[t]hat’s just a beginning” (Focus group

B, p. 14), and the whole situation is not finalized yet, as “... both sides, the Chinese and German, just need to follow up” (Focus group B, p. 15). The German participants, on the other hand, seemed to accept the scenario as the end of the professors’ communication. Participants of the German and Chinese focus groups pointed out that they perceived it as ‘rude’ and ‘not polite’ not to receive any feedback from either party.

Focus groups comprehensive comparison of findings

Overall, all three of the focus groups elicited lively discussions on various themes that were not anticipated by the researcher before the focus groups took place, and hence, confirmed the ideal suitability of the focus group method for collecting data for this research project.

It became apparent from the focus groups that culturally diverse participants perceived and interpreted communication styles differently. A comparison of the findings of all three focus groups clearly demonstrated the diversity of participants’ perception in regard to the communication style used by the U.S. manager in the first scenario. Whereas the German and New Zealand participants described the manager’s communication style as ‘direct’ and ‘aggressive’, Chinese participants, on the other hand, perceived the communication style as ‘kindly’ and ‘normal’. Chinese participants understood the U.S. manager as ‘gentle’, as he slowed his words down while talking to the Asian employee and, moreover, was recognized to only do his job. New Zealand participants, in contrast, pointed out that the U.S. manager’s communication behavior was not only perceived as direct, but ‘insulting’, hence, impolite and inappropriate in this situation. Although German and New Zealand participants discussed the manager’s direct approach in this scenario as aggressive and impolite, participants of both focus groups noted that some managers in German and New Zealand companies still communicate in this manner nowadays.

The rather indirect and ‘meandering’ communication style of the Chinese in the second scenario, on the other hand, caused a higher degree of interpretation for the German and New Zealand participants, as it was perceived less ‘clear’ and ‘transparent’ than the German managers’ direct approach. The German managers in the second scenario were perceived as “... quite open and up front ...” (Focus group C, p. 9) by the New Zealand participants, as they “... set their cards on the table about how things should be done” (Focus group C, p. 9). German and New Zealand

participants, therefore, pointed out how ‘frustrating’ it can be to deal with the Chinese, since participants were forced and expected “... to read between the lines ...” (Focus group A, p. 10), as facts and details are not stated explicitly. Opposed to the Chinese, German participants highlighted the importance of sharing information and providing details and facts in order to successfully conduct business deals, and develop trust amongst parties. One German participant stated “I would say the Germans are stating clearly what they want and what they expect. So, I would say equals trustworthy and honest” (Focus group A, p. 19). It was, moreover, discussed by the German participants that the direct approach was used by the German managers due to efficiency reasons, to speed up the process, and get all the information and facts required in order to close the deal as fast as possible. One German participant stated “[t]hey are under time pressure. So it’s ok to be straightforward and direct” (Focus group A, p. 2). Chinese participants, on the contrary, highlighted the importance of a strong and solid relationship in order to conduct business deals, and pointed out that facts and details are less important, and were not discussed as having any bearing on the development of trust in business relationships. Although the Chinese participants generally agreed to prefer a direct approach for conducting business deals with foreigners (Westerners), it was mentioned that a too direct and transparent communication style might result in a rather ‘stupid’ perception of the other person, “... because totally you can see what they want and not. But for Chinese talking you need to go back to think about it” (Focus group B, p. 9).

In regard to the honesty and trustworthiness of the Chinese managers in the second scenario, New Zealand participants pointed out that “... there is nothing in their communication style that would suggest impropriety to me. I would just instinctively be more cautious dealing with Chinese than Germans” (Focus group C, p. 6). However, New Zealand participants also noted that “... both in each of their communication styles, I would trust them based on each of their ways of doing things” (Focus group C, p. 9). Personal experience, or cultural stereotyping, in addition, was discussed by the New Zealand participants to account for the assessment of trustworthiness of another person, and overall, participants of all three focus groups generally considered the Germans as more trustworthy and honest due to their cultural heritage.

However, the New Zealand participants noted that the reserved communication style of the Chinese in the second scenario suggests that they are

honest, as they were considered to be cautious. In one person's words "... the Chinese caution suggests to me that they don't have any inferior motives" (Focus group C, p. 9). Although the German managers were considered honest and trustworthy due to their direct and transparent approach to provide all facts and information straight away, one New Zealand participant noted "[i]f I was going to distrust anybody in this scenario, it probably would be the Germans. Just in this case. The Germans are pushing for the contract to sign" (Focus group C, p. 8).

The length of the reply of the German professor in the third scenario caused lively discussions, and revealed mixed findings for the focus groups. Whereas all female participants of the German focus group understood the German professor's reply as a clear statement of facts, and a precise description of his situation, the two male German participants and the majority of the Chinese and New Zealand participants, in contrast, understood the long and elaborate reply as a polite excuse to reject the Chinese professors invitation. New Zealand participant, however, pointed out that they "... don't doubt that the details are correct" (Focus group C, p. 10), nevertheless, interpret the message as a 'polite no'. It was argued by the majority of participants that the length of the reply caused suspicion as the German professor was expected to reply in a short and clear manner if he was interested. New Zealand and Chinese participants, therefore, concluded that the German professor's long and 'convoluted speech' was a result of his attempt to reply in a typical Asian 'face saving' manner, as he was dealing with a Chinese. Likewise, one Chinese participant noted that the German professor's reply was "... too much curved ..." (Focus group B, p. 13), and perceived as mostly including negative information, hence, was understood as a polite rejection of the invitation. Although it was argued by New Zealand participants that the German professor "... being from his culture, he possibly would have just said no" (Focus group C, p. 12), his reply, nevertheless, was understood as a polite excuse by the majority of participants.

Owing to the complexity of the third scenario and the difficulties participants of all three focus groups experienced interpreting the intent of the German professor and the meaning of his reply, no clear findings can be reported from the third scenario.

The following table summarizes participants' interpretations of the German professor's reply in the third scenario.

	Direct yes	Direct no	Indirect, polite no	Indirect yes	Abstain / not sure
A - male			2 (2)		
A - female	4 (4)				
B	1 (4)	2 (4)	1 (4)		
C	1 (4)		2 (4)		1 (4)

Table 6: Participants' interpretation of the German professor's reply in the third scenario

Scenario two, in addition, also disclosed diversity in participants' perceptions of the German and Chinese managers' communication approaches. Whereas the German participants described the German managers as quite 'bossy', "... arrogant and rude ..." (Focus group A, p. 5), "... dictating the plan ..." (Focus group A, p. 8), and therefore as trying to "... put their view over everything ..." (Focus group A, p. 6), the Chinese participants, on the other hand, pointed out that "... in a real situation, the Chinese would be maybe more eager to finalize this agreement instead of German manager to push it. I think in a real situation it's opposite" (Focus group B, p. 7). Although the German and New Zealand participants considered the Chinese managers' communication style in scenario two as less direct, they, nevertheless, perceived the Chinese managers as quite direct and open in stating certain things. However, the German and New Zealand participants highlighted that the Chinese communication approach was perceived polite, as the way the Chinese managers replied sounded more indirect, hence polite. A clear differentiation of perceptions, therefore, can be reported in regard to the interpretation of the Chinese communication style, as the Chinese participants understood the Chinese managers' approach as too indirect taking into account they were dealing with Germans. German participants, however, stressed that the German managers in the second scenario were on no account impolite, it is just "... the German way of being polite. By being direct" (Focus group A, p. 8), and "... by saying we need that signed now, it's actually the German way of being polite by not fluffing around and wasting anyone's time" (Focus group A, p. 8).

The importance of relationships to conduct business deals was highlighted by the Chinese participants, and participants linked business relationships to personal relationships and even to ties of friendship. German participants, on the other hand, pointed out that personal relationships have no bearing on business deals. It was clearly stated by the German participants that Germans "... keep relationships out of business. So it's just about business, we are not here to make friends necessarily. It's about money" (Focus group A, p. 8), whereas Chinese participants, in contrast, highlighted that "... business is always relationship. You can't do business without relationship" (Focus group C, p. 11). Chinese participants, moreover, pointed out that "... to build a relationship is more worth than to do some lawyer, black white document" (Focus group B, p. 8), whereas the German participants stressed the importance "... to have everything black and white on the contract" (Focus group A, p. 5). The contract itself and the signing of the contract were perceived as a sign of trust by the German participants, and as necessary in order to start the business relationship. Chinese participants, on the contrary, considered the contract to be less important, and in contrast, stressed the importance of networks and social activities in order to establish business relationships. New Zealand participants recognized the differences between the German and Chinese approaches, and described themselves as sitting "... a bit more between the Chinese and Germans" (Focus group C, p. 3), since "... we would have an aspect of getting to know the other person. Some sort of social interaction before we sign the deal. But certainly not like the Chinese" (Focus group C, p. 3).

The signing of the contract was discussed by participants of all three focus groups as a differentiating element across the focus group cultures and, moreover, as having an impact on the development of trust. It was recognized by all participants that the signing of the contract occurs at different stages of the negotiation process for the Chinese and German managers in the second scenario. German participants pointed out that for the German managers trust will be established between the parties due to the signing of the contract, whereas the Chinese participants highlighted that trust amongst the parties will be established owing to their existing relationship, and needs to be achieved before the signing of the contract. The signing of the contract was described by the Chinese participants as a formality, not having any bearing on the establishment of trust in relationships. Whereas the German participants described the signing of the contract as necessary to start the business relationship, the Chinese

participants clearly counter-argued by pointing out that relationships have to be established before the signing of the deal, as trust is generated by relationships, not by the contract. It was stated by one German participant that

[f]or Germans it's like we need a signature first and after I have the signature, after I have the deal signed I'm willing to get to know you and willing to spend time with you to socialize, to, you know, discuss more, because we have finalized the deal. I'm sure that we are going to do this. Whereas for the Chinese, they need to get to know the people first. And afterwards they can sign the deal. It's just a different approach, I guess. (Focus group A, p. 7)

An additional theme that became apparent as a result of the comparison of the focus group findings was the participants' diverse perceptions of timeframes to conduct business. It was clearly pointed out by all focus group participants that the German approach revealed a strong focus on 'quick money' and financial benefits of the deal, as 'time is money', considered from a Western perspective. The Chinese, in contrast, were described as future-oriented and focusing on long-term aspects, with a much stronger focus on the 'big picture'. Money was not only seen to account for short term benefits from the German side, but also as a sign of trust for the German participants. German participants pointed out that trust would emerge between the parties in the scenario, as the German company invests large amounts of money in the deal, which was considered a signal of trustworthiness from a German perspective.

Hierarchy, in addition, seemed to play a crucial role in the first scenario for participants of all three focus group. One German participant highlighted that the German manager "... showed that he has power and that he is in the hierarchy" (Focus group A, p. 1). Whereas the German participants pointed out that the manager "... wouldn't keep his position for very long if he would continue like this" (Focus group A, p. 3), Chinese participants, in contrast, stated that "[i]f he's the boss, he can do whatever he want. If your employee doesn't happy, you can either accept or you can either leave the company. It's your choice" (Focus group B, p. 2). Likewise, one Chinese participant stressed that "... the employee should respect the manager" (Focus group C, p. 3). It was highlighted by the German and New Zealand participants that, although the 'rude' and 'unfriendly' communications style of the German manager was discussed as 'inappropriate' since 'impolite', it still occurs in modern companies nowadays, and is tolerated by employees.

The comparison of the German and New Zealand focus group discussions disclosed further differentiations of participants' conceptions of an appropriate chain of command in the first scenario. One New Zealand participant noted that the U.S. manager "... wants to circumvent proper channels" (Focus group C, p. 2), and hence stated "[y]ou don't go directly to the staff member, you go to their manager and follow the chain of command" (Focus group C, p. 2). One German participant, in contrast, highlighted that the U.S. manager "... should say it to the person responsible and not to someone else. I wouldn't have a problem with a communication style like that if he addresses the right person" (Focus group A, p. 2). German participants, moreover, discussed it as 'unprofessional' and perceived it as "... talking bad behind the back of someone else" (Focus group A, p. 2) that the U.S. manager talked to someone else instead of addressing the person responsible.

Participants of all focus groups agreed that the cultural background of members of all parties present in the cross-cultural encounter need to be taken into account when communicating across cultures. Therefore, the appropriateness of the particular communication style was discussed as depending on the cultural background of the individuals. Participants of all three focus groups stressed the need to differentiate between doing business with members of their own culture and doing business with individuals from another culture. Moreover, knowledge and background information on the company, as well as the country or culture the prospective business partner is from, were discussed as crucial in order to assess trustworthiness, and successfully conduct business across cultures.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses key findings in the context of the literature presented earlier. It is structured into three main parts, starting with a short discussion about the utility of the methodological approach for this research project, and an overview of the three scenarios. The second part identifies the key themes and discusses findings with relevant concepts. The chapter ends with an overall summary, aimed at answering the research question and the two sub-questions.

Since findings, in line with the literature review, indicate that the establishment of trust and the assessment of another persons' trustworthiness highly depends on the situation and context (Harris & Dibben, 1999; Thomas et al., 2009), findings regarding trust in scenario two and three are discussed in relation to the particular scenarios.

The use of critical incident scenarios in studies of intercultural communication

The use and design of the critical incident technique in the focus group discussions was very important for this research project in order to gather qualitative data in the field of intercultural communication and trust. Since contextual and situational factors are crucial but difficult to capture in the area of intercultural communication as well as trust, the choice of a critical incident scenario discussion in focus groups offers significant utility in a field where quantitative studies predominate. Although the concept of using critical incidents in the form of scenarios has been applied before (McAllister et al., 2006; Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Tanaka & Bell, 1996; Sullivan & Peterson, 1982), this research project offers a different design by utilizing the critical incidents for group discussions in focus groups.

Discussing written scenarios in the form of intercultural critical incidents was seen as a most valuable means to collect data across cultures, and at the same time assuring comparability of findings across the focus groups. Since participants of all three focus groups discussed the same scenarios, findings and participants' statements are easily comparable across the focus groups, and culturally specific differences or similarities can become apparent. Additionally, the utilization of the critical incident method turned out to be a very fruitful approach to energize and stimulate discussion

in the focus groups, and collect the rich and in-depth data aimed for in this research project.

The critical incident approach is discussed as having particular utility in intercultural settings (McAllister et al., 2006), and was also found most useful for this study. The discussion of the critical incidents allowed the researcher to capture rich, in-depth, qualitative data in the field of intercultural communication and trust, which is typically difficult to gather owing to the highly contextual and situational nature of the topics. Through discussing and analyzing precisely defined scenarios, participants of all three focus groups had to refer to the same situations under the same conditions, allowing for comparability of the data across all three focus groups, and enabling an analysis of the findings in context of the relevant literature.

The design of the focus groups enabled the researcher to gather the rich and in-depth data needed to answer the research question and the two sub-questions, by following the guideline questions, and at the same capture unexpected ideas and thoughts regarding participants' underlying values and beliefs. A qualitative approach, hence, was indicated in order to answer the research questions.

The format of the open-ended question protocol offered participants the possibility to contribute with their own ideas and thoughts, and unexpected themes were uncovered, which contributed considerably to the analysis of the data and findings from the focus groups. For instance, the concept of *guanxi* was introduced by Chinese participants uncovering the greater interconnectedness of concepts all unconsciously influencing participants' values and beliefs, and hence, also their perceptions of communication styles. The focus group interview, therefore, was found to be the ideal method of data collection, since participants were not restricted to answering the questions, but were also given the chance to contribute their own thoughts and ideas, and hence, enable the emergence of culturally determined themes and concepts different from what was expected by the researcher.

The group effect of the focus group is of particular importance for this research project since the group effect leads to a reinforcement of participants' culture by enhancing culturally determined perspectives and perceptions, thereby, mitigating individual personal preferences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Bryman, 2008). Since this research project aims to uncover culturally determined factors influencing participants' perceptions, the group effect can be seen as essential for providing the necessary framework.

Overall, all three of the focus groups elicited lively discussions on various themes that were not anticipated by the researcher before the focus groups took place, and hence, confirmed the ideal suitability of the focus group method for collecting data for this research project.

The three scenarios

The first scenario was particularly beneficial for uncovering participants' cultural specific perceptions and thoughts on the direct communication style. Although influenced by status and hierarchy diversity of the characters in the scenario, the first scenario was useful in demonstrating a direct mode and capturing participants' reactions and perceptions. Moreover, the DVD scene, as a visual element, facilitated the stimulation of the discussion amongst the participants. The discussion of the first scenario was rather short, due to the lengths of the DVD scene, and associated questions were only based on participants' perceptions of the direct mode. This scenario had no bearing on trust, hence, no questions on the topic of trust were asked. The scenario was chosen to illustrate and highlight differences in communication styles between cultures. Moreover, the very direct approach of the U.S. manager provided an obvious basis for participants to comment on, and stimulated the discussion amongst participants.

The second scenario was most useful for capturing participants' thoughts on diverse communication styles and identifying themes and elements influencing participants' perceptions of another party's trustworthiness. A variety of interconnected concepts unconsciously impacting participants' perceptions were identified following a close examination of participants' answers in the context of the relevant literature. Scenario two provided much ground for discussion on participants' interpretations as to why and for what reasons they perceived the two parties represented in the scenario as trustworthy. Moreover, the scenario provided this research project with key findings and identified elements and concepts that need to be taken into consideration when assessing trust across cultures.

The second scenario provided crucial feedback on both the applied communication style and participants' perceptions of trust and the assessment of trustworthiness. The findings from the second scenario indicate the application of diverse categories of trust for the German and Chinese managers, required for the

establishment of business relationships across cultures, as identified by the participants.

However, it needs to be mentioned that the German and New Zealand participants described the second scenario as unauthentic, as the communication style of the Chinese managers was perceived as too direct, taken the cultural background of the Chinese managers into account. Interestingly enough, the Chinese participants reported a different perception and explained that the Chinese managers would be even more straightforward and push for the business deal in a real business situation.

Mixed results can be reported from the third scenario, as much discussion arose from the last sentence of the scenario. Nevertheless, useful data was gathered from this scenario in regard to participants' interpretation of the German professor's reply, as well as elements impacting participants' perceptions of trustworthiness. The scenario, moreover, provided interesting findings uncovering the connection between the chosen communication style, and the relationship status between the parties involved.

Key themes

Directness - Culture specific perceptions of directness

This research project indicates interesting and significant findings regarding the preference for a direct communication style by members of diverse cultures. The first scenario proved highly useful in investigating culturally specific preferences for communication styles, as the focus group guideline questions associated with the first scenario focused on researching preferences for communication styles and individual's perceptions on the direct mode.

The findings from the first scenario were significant, since findings indicate a contrast to what is discussed by a variety of scholars, for all three cultures examined in this study. Most literature on intercultural communication, directness and politeness in particular (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Brown & Levinson, 1987), suggest a preference of the direct mode for low-context, individualistic cultures, such as Germany and New Zealand, and a preference for an indirect mode for high-context, collectivistic cultures, such as China (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Thomas, 2008; Ulijn et al., 2000). The focus group discussion of the first scenario suggests a preference on the part of the Chinese participants for a direct

communication style, whereas the German and New Zealand participants showed strong reactions about the inappropriateness of the communication style, and described the direct mode as impolite.

In contrast to what might have been expected on the grounds of the literature review in chapter two, German and New Zealand participants as members of low-context, individualistic cultures were found to associate the direct mode with impoliteness, and highlighted the importance of contextual and situational factors in regard to an appropriate 'degree' of directness. Participants explained that the degree of directness plays a crucial role and a 'too direct' communication style, therefore, was considered inappropriate in a business context. Furthermore, German and New Zealand participants mentioned the need to differentiate between business and social setting, in regard to the degree of directness considered appropriate. However, Kim (2010) points out that what level of verbal or direct communication will be seen as normal or appropriate also depends on a person's culture, and hence, what is perceived as appropriate varies across cultures and cannot be discussed without taking cultural factors into consideration.

German and New Zealand participants described the direct approach in the first scenario as inappropriate, since the manager was perceived as 'aggressive', which was said to 'create fear', resulting in a 'counter-productive' outcome. In addition to the U.S. manager's verbal communication style, his body language and his tone were recognized by the German and New Zealand participants to result in a negative perception of his intentions.

New Zealand, Germany and China

Interestingly, although New Zealand has a higher score on Hofstede's individualism dimension than Germany and China, and hence, was anticipated to prefer a direct approach, New Zealand participants were found to show strong reactions about the direct mode in the first scenario. Since a majority of scholars discusses individualistic cultures to have a preference for a low-context communication style, and hence, favor a direct communication style (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Thomas, 2008; Ulijn et al., 2000), findings of this research project might indicate a contrast to what is suggested by the majority of studies examined for this research project. Findings of this research project, therefore, clearly support the call for more empirical research on Hall's (1977) contexting model.

The following table provides a comparison of the cultural profiles of China, Germany, and New Zealand, for Hofstede's (2001) individualism dimension.

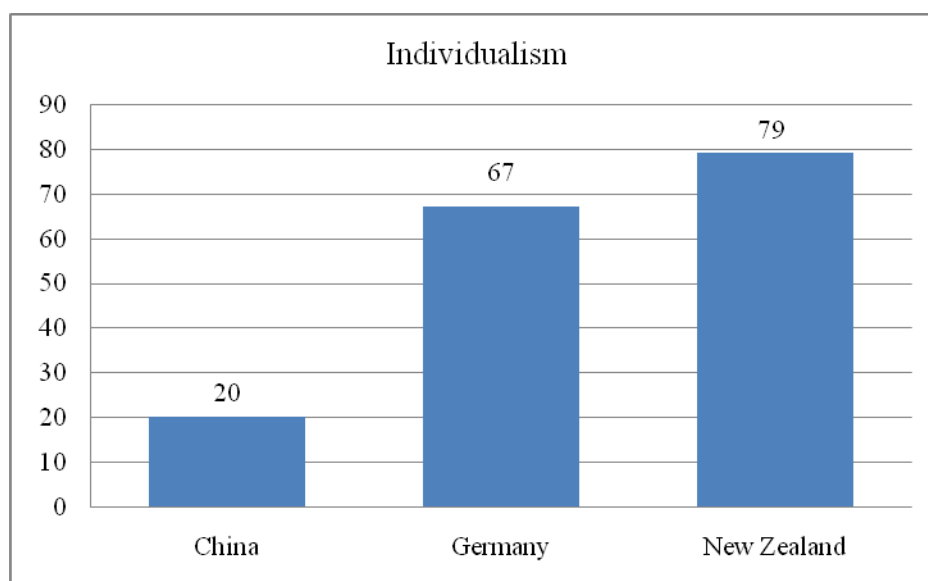


Figure 2: The dimension of Individualism (on the basis of Hofstede, 2001)

The contradicting findings from the New Zealand focus group in regard to their perception of the direct communication style of the U.S. manager in the first scenario can be partially explained on the basis of the cultural dimension of horizontal individualism (Triandis, 1995; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand, 1995; Peel & Inkson, 2000). The dimension of “[h]orizontal individualism includes the conception of an autonomous individual and emphasis on equality” (Singelis et al., 1995, p. 240), highlighting that “... people should be similar on most attributes, especially status” (Triandis, 1995, p. 44). According to Peel and Inkson (2000), in New Zealand “... the individual is seen as being autonomous but others are seen as being more or less equal in status” (p. 204).

Moreover, the strong influence of mostly collectivistic oriented cultures, such as Maori, immigrants from Pacific Islands and Asian countries, seem to mitigate the effects of individualism in New Zealand (Peel & Inkson, 2000). The impact of over 20% of the New Zealand population being from collectivistic heritage (Peel & Inkson, 2000), could explain the preference of New Zealand participants for a rather indirect approach, as opposed to the suggested preference of a direct communication style due to the high ranking of New Zealand on Hofstede's individualism dimension. This observation is supported by a statement of one New Zealand participant, pointing out

that New Zealanders "... probably sit a bit more between the Chinese and the Germans" (Focus group C, p. 3), since "...we would be slightly less direct than the Germans ..." (Focus group C, p. 3).

Even more interesting are the findings from the Chinese focus group, since Chinese participants, although members of a high-context, collectivistic culture, demonstrated a strong preference for a direct mode. Findings, therefore, were unexpected since a number of studies would suggest that a different finding was more likely. With a very low score of 20 on Hofstede's individualism dimension, China is considered to be a highly collectivistic and high-context communication culture, and therefore, considered to favor an indirect communication style (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Thomas, 2008).

Due to the close interconnectedness of a variety of concepts, findings suggest that several factors seem to unconsciously influence participants' perceptions. Owing to the characteristics of the Chinese culture, with its roots in Confucianism, resulting in a collectivistic oriented culture with a strong focus on establishing and maintaining relationships and networks, as well as *face* and group harmony to support and keep such relationships, a preference for an indirect communication style was suggested by the literature (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Thomas, 2008). Since *face*, group harmony and politeness are closely interlinked concepts (Triandis, 1995), findings of the Chinese focus group showing a preference for a direct communication style, are even more surprising and interesting.

Similarly interesting are the findings of the German focus group, as members of the German culture are discussed in the literature as individualists with a preference for a low-context communication style, and therefore, considered to prefer a direct mode (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Thomas, 2008). Although German participants had less strong reactions to the direct approach than New Zealand participants, they, nevertheless, described the communication style of the U.S. manager in the first scenario as 'aggressive' and 'impolite', whereas Chinese participants described the communication style as 'kindly', 'normal', and 'still polite'. Chinese participants pointed out that the U.S. manager "... is still polite. He goes right to the point" (Focus group B, p. 3), which was considered 'normal' in a business context. Although German and New Zealand participants considered the straightforward communication approach of the U.S. manager in the first scenario as impolite, they nevertheless, highlighted that this is "... the usual way in Western

cultures” (Focus group A, p. 1), since the U.S. manager’s intentions were interpreted as searching, and hence “... pushing for an answer” (Focus group A, p. 1). One German participant’s statement “[t]hey are under time pressure. So it’s ok to be straightforward and direct” (Focus group A, p. 2), summarizes and clearly shows the link between the chosen degree of directness in regard to the culturally determined timeframe required for conducting business.

The desire of the German participants to be sensitive to issues of politeness while still being direct can be explained on the basis of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) concept of *conventionalized indirectness* (Ogiermann, 2009). Although some scholars suggest that Germans prefer a direct mode, Brown and Levinson (1987) point out that the level of directness has to be taken into consideration in regard to politeness and *face*-concerns. Ogiermann’s (2009) study suggests that although directness is appreciated by members of the German culture, the level of directness considered polite is lower than for instance for Russian and Polish people. Moreover, Ogiermann’s (2009) study reveals that the German language has been characterized as more direct than English, and thus, might offer an additional explanation as to why New Zealander participants showed stronger feelings about the U.S. manager’s communication style in the first scenario, and why New Zealand participants perceived the direct mode as less polite than the German participants.

New Zealand and German participants perceived the direct communication style in the second scenario as ‘open’ and ‘honest’, and as a ‘clear’ and ‘transparent’ statement of facts. This can be explained on the basis of Hall’s (1977) contexting model, taking into account that New Zealand and Germany are both individualistic countries with a suggested preference for a low-context communication styles. The Chinese ambiguity, therefore, seemed to play a crucial role for the German and New Zealand participants, as the ‘meandering’ communication style, as pointed out by the New Zealand participants, resulted in much confusion about the true intentions of the Chinese managers in the second scenario. Since New Zealand and German participants, as members of individualistic, low-context cultures tend to prefer linear logic and linguistic clarity (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988), meaning explicit verbal statements of facts and information, it is not surprising that the Chinese high-context, indirect approach can lead to misunderstandings due to a misinterpretation of the meaning of the message. Woo and Prud’homme (1999) highlight that it can be

quite difficult for foreigners, or Westerners, "... to interpret the real meaning ..." (p. 319) of a Chinese message.

Findings of the German focus group are quite interesting as a gender difference in interpretation might be apparent in the third scenario. However, it needs to be mentioned that this gender difference in interpretation cannot be justified due to the low number of participants. Further research, hence, is recommended to investigate the likelihood of a gender specific interpretation of the third scenario. No indication for a gender difference in interpretation can be reported from the Chinese and New Zealand focus groups though since only male participants attended the Chinese focus group, and findings from the New Zealand focus group were mixed.

The link between directness and relationships

Although Chinese participants demonstrated a preference for a direct communication style in business setting, they, nonetheless, criticized the German's low-context communication style by stating "... totally you can see what they want and not. But for Chinese talking you need to go back to think about it. Oh, he want it this way" (Focus group B, p. 9).

Chinese participants, furthermore, critiqued the German's low-context communication approach in the second scenario for disclosing too much information, and hence making themselves vulnerable to the other party at a very early stage. The importance of strong (business) relationships was mentioned again in this context, and Chinese participants pointed out that "[i]n China there's a phrase like "You tell more, you are going to lose more". Because you disclose your weakness to other people" (Focus group B, p. 18). Participants explained that an open approach and the sharing of crucial information was considered appropriate between close friends but not when interacting with strangers. Therefore, findings suggest that an open and straightforward communication approach might be preferred by the Chinese people when interacting with people they have already established a relationship with. An indirect approach, on the other hand, might be preferred when dealing with strangers, in order to avoid vulnerability, and a disclosure of weakness to the other party.

Likewise, participants pointed out that the interpretation of the German professor's reply in the third scenario as a direct or indirect statement "[d]epends on how deep their relationship is" (Focus group B, p. 16). Similar to Beamer (2003), findings of this research project suggest that a direct communication style might indicate a close relationship between parties, and hence, can also function as a sign of

trust. This research project, therefore, lends support to Beamer's (2003) study, which asserts that the preference for and use of directness increases with the strengthening of the relationship. Since the willingness to disclose weaknesses and show vulnerability depends on the relationship, the relationship status, hence, is crucial for the willingness to establish trust between the parties. Conversely, an indirect communication style, although considered polite in particular at the beginning of a relationship, might diminish the willingness of the Chinese to trust the other party, as the indirectness might infer that no strong relationship has yet been established. This suggests a positive impact of the direct communication style on the development of trust, from a Chinese perspective, and based on the relationship.

Hierarchy and power

It is possible that Chinese participants consider the direct approach of the U.S. manager in the first scenario as 'normal' due to status and hierarchy considerations. Hofstede's (1984) power distance index, therefore, offers a valuable framework to analyze and interpret the findings in this regard. Since China, with a value of 80 and New Zealand with a value of 22 (Hofstede, 2001), scores very high and very low respectively on the power distance dimension, differences in participants' perceptions might become apparent. Since an unequal distribution of power is accepted and expected in the Chinese culture (Hofstede, 2001), it is not surprising that the Chinese participants perceived the manager's communication style as 'normal'. The power distance index, thus, might offer an explanation as to why the Chinese participants considered the U.S. manager's direct communication approach in the first scenario as 'normal' and appropriate in the given situation. Although one Chinese participant mentioned that the manager's approach puts pressure on the employee, the majority of participants stressed that his communication style is "... very normal though. Something went wrong and the manager would just talk to you this way" (Focus group B, p. 3). Moreover it was highlighted that "[t]he way he asks is still polite. He goes right to the point. He doesn't make up a long story, he goes right to the point" (Focus group B, p. 3), which was considered appropriate behavior in this situation. Statements such as "... he's the boss, he can do whatever he want" (Focus group B, p. 2), and "... the employee should respect the manager" (Focus group B, p. 3), therefore, are in support of China's high score on Hofstede's power distance dimension.

These findings support the emphasis on power and hierarchy in the Chinese culture, and indicate a correlation between power, and the degree of directness perceived as appropriate in a given situation. The existence of status differences in the first scenario may also serve as an explanation as to why the New Zealand participants showed strong reactions about the U.S. manager's direct approach. Members of the New Zealand culture with a low score of 22 on Hofstede's power distance index (Hofstede, 2001), might consider the direct approach as inappropriate and impolite due to their culturally determined expectations of an equal distribution of power, and hence, an equal treatment of all members of a society. Germany, with a score of 35 (Hofstede, 2001) lies between China and New Zealand on the power distance dimension, which also reflects the findings of the German participants' perceptions of the U.S. manager's communication approach in the first scenario. Additionally, the concept of horizontal-individualism offers a possible explanation as to why New Zealanders participants perceived the U.S. manager's approach as inappropriate and 'very aggressive', based on their cultural assumption that people should be treated equally (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis, 1995; Peel & Inkson, 2000).

The following figure shows the power distance index ranking for Germany, China, and New Zealand.

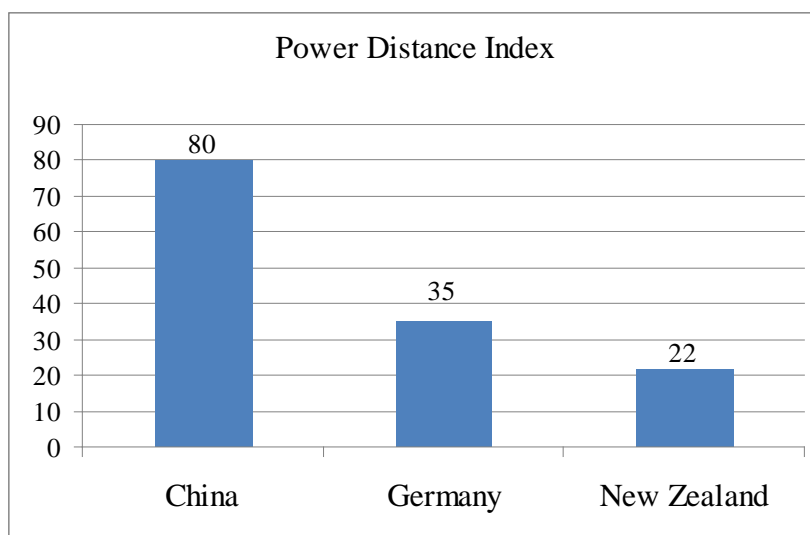


Figure 3: The dimension of power distance index (on the basis of Hofstede, 2001)

Relationships

Guanxi

German and New Zealand participants noted that "... the Chinese emphasize the relationship aspect ..." (Focus group A, p. 5), and the need to establish strong relationships first in order to conduct business, whereas "... the relationship aspect is less important for the Germans" (Focus group A, p. 5), since "[t]hey are looking for the facts ..." (Focus group A, p. 5). The actual significance of Chinese relationships and the role of *guanxi*, however, only became apparent after this notion was introduced and explained by the Chinese participants. Chinese participants seem to be in general agreement that "... business is always relationship. You can't do business without relationship" (Focus group B, p. 11).

Findings, therefore, indicate that *guanxi* is not only crucial for successful business relationships, as the establishment of relationships and networks is seen as vital to conduct business in China, *guanxi* also seems to have an impact on the establishment of trust. Chinese participants explained that successful business relies on trusting relationships, professional as well as social relationships. In one Chinese participant's words

... you start a business, you have no relationship with everybody. You chose one to build a relationship, and that's the normal way. The easier way for people, somebody introduced to me some guy to do business with and they have already business relationship with that other guy, it means that he's trustful, trustworthy. And then maybe it takes less time to know his background because of the background from my friend. (Focus group B, p. 12)

Moreover, Chinese participants highlighted the importance of social aspects and friendships between business partners as key elements for successful business. Since establishing trust, and thus trusting relationships, takes time, findings regarding the required time span to conduct business, or start a business relationship, also varies across cultures. Although most scholars agree that developing trust takes time (Greenberg & Baron, 2008; Bjerke, 1999; Greenberg, 2011), the lengths of the required time span also seems to depend on the cultural background of the parties involved, due to diverse underlying values and beliefs (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Harris & Dibben, 1999).

In accordance with the literature review from chapter two, findings lend support to the observation that the Chinese people in business settings might need a longer time span to conduct or start business relationship due to their desire to establish and deepen trusting relationships first (Bjerke, 1999; Harris & Dibben, 1999). Chinese participants highlighted that showing ‘sincerity’ is necessary to build relationships, as *guanxi* is associated with ‘honour’ and ‘trust’.

Revealing existing relationships or networks, therefore, was discussed as a key element for starting business deals. If no *guanxi* exists between business partners, which might be quite common when business is conducted internationally, the Chinese require a much longer time span in order to be willing to trust the new, and hence, unknown business partner. Lending support to this observation, Chinese participants in this study identified trust as a key element, and pointed out that knowledge of the other party is required to start a business relationship and assess the other party’s honesty. Chinese participants agreed “... the most important thing is how can I trust you?” (Focus group B, p. 8).

Time

Findings can be interpreted in terms of various theories and concepts, which seem to be interrelated and influence participants’ perceptions. Individualism-collectivism, high- and low-context communication cultures, *guanxi* (*Confucianism*), *facework*, politeness, and conceptions of time were identified to be closely interwoven and seem to influence participants’ interpretation of a given situation. Hofstede’s (2001) long-term orientation dimension, which is strongly influenced by Confucianism, and hence, also linked to the concepts of collectivism and *guanxi*, was found to play a crucial role for the Chinese participants.

Findings indicate that culturally diverse perceptions of time might impact participants’ choice and consideration of the appropriateness of the communication style. German and New Zealand participants stressed their general preference for a direct mode in business settings, which can be explained on the basis of their rather Western perception of ‘time is money’, in business settings in particular. Since the Western business attitude emphasizes a strong preference for short-term, financial outcomes, focusing on ‘quick money’, findings suggest that the direct communication style might be preferred due to efficiency reasons. However, in contrast to views in the literature (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hall, 1977; Ulijn et al., 2000), the Chinese participants showed no strong feelings about the direct

approach, and did not correlate the direct communication style to impoliteness. Although the Chinese were expected to prefer an indirect mode (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Hall, 1977), Chinese participants in this research project showed a strong preference for the direct mode in scenario one, and likewise, demonstrated a high acceptance of the direct mode for the second and third scenario.

It can be considered likely that differences in participants' perceptions regarding a preference for long-term versus short-term thinking, and an orientation towards future outcomes versus quick, current profits unconsciously impacts participants' choice and consideration of the appropriateness of the communication style, in business settings in particular. Participants of all three focus groups (of all three cultures) highlighted that the German manager in the second scenario clearly adopted a Western business approach, focusing on 'money' and 'profit'.

Likewise, German and New Zealand participants pointed out that 'time is money', from a Western perspective. Findings, in this regard, are in line with the literature of a short-term and profit oriented Western business approach (Engholm, 1991; Bjerke, 1999). The same comment can be made about the description of the Chinese managers in the second scenario. German and New Zealand participants recognized the Chinese emphasis on long-term relationships and *guanxi* as distinctive characteristics of the Chinese business approach, consistent with literature (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). Chinese participants stress the 'long-term' aspect of relationships, the 'big-picture' and the long-term product'.

Findings support other research which shows that friendships and social relationships (*guanxi*) are central to Chinese business relationships (Hofstede, 2001). Hence, it is little surprising that Chinese participants highlighted the role of honesty and trust by pointing out "[i]f you want to do business to me, you should be honest to me. And I should be honest to you. Like, we need to trust each other. So we can earn more profit in the longer term" (Focus group B, p. 8).

Moreover, it was highlighted that some sort of social or personal interaction is required to establish and foster successful business relationships. The social and personal aspect of the relationship was stressed by Chinese participants since relationships were considered from a long-term perspective. Participants highlighted the significance of establishing friendship between business partners and pointed out that friendship infers that "... you take care of each other ..." (Focus group B, p. 11), which was considered 'more trustful', so more useful for the future. Due to its

undoubted connection to *guanxi*, this topic was added to the literature review chapter, and examined more closely.

Trust

Calculus- and identification-based trust

Scenario two highlighted the role of diverse categories of trust required for the development of business relationships across cultures. Participants of all three focus groups agreed on the significant role of the relationship to conduct business in China, indicating a desire to establish *identification-based trust* from a Chinese perspective. Participants, in accordance with the literature (Woo & Prud'homme, 1999), stressed the importance of trust (*identification-based trust*) to develop business relationships.

On the other hand, participants of all three focus groups highlighted the focus of the German managers on contracts in regard to trust, also stressing that the relationship aspect does not seem to influence the development of trust in business relationships. German and New Zealand participants clearly stated that “[p]artnership is just business” (Focus group A, p. 6), and “[y]ou rely on your lawyers and your contracts to protect you rather than solid personal relationships ...” (Focus group C, p. 3). Since business, from a Western perspective, is all about money and profit, people rely on contracts to secure business deals and trust is generated due to contracts and based on economic aspects. Trust is generated by contracts since the fulfillment of the contract is not negotiable from a German perspective. Trust (*calculus-based trust*), thus, is created due to the contract and an economic consideration of costs and benefits (Bhattacharya et al., 1998). In one New Zealand participant's words “[t]hey [the Germans] do exactly what they say they do, due to the nature of the contract” (Focus group C, p. 6). Findings, therefore, might indicate that the German participants rely on *calculus-based trust* for establishing business relationships in the second scenario. The ‘nature of the contract’ and the fear of punishment for breaking the contract was discussed by the German participants as the reasons to act according to the conditions of the contract. A clear distinction between the German and Chinese business approach, therefore, might be suggested by the findings. It needs to be mentioned though, that participants of all three focus groups agreed that the development of trust and the assessment of another person's trustworthiness always depends on the situation and the context, regardless of the cultural background of the parties. The notion that trust is contextual and situational can also be found

throughout the literature (Bhattacharya et al., 1998), and findings of this research project, therefore, need to be considered in the context of the given scenarios, and cannot be generalized to every situation.

However, for the given scenario (scenario two) findings might indicate a reliance of the German managers on *calculus-based trust* to establish and assess trust in the business relationship, whereas the Chinese managers are discussed to focus on *identification-based trust* to establish trusting business relationships and assess trustworthiness. A strong emphasis was placed by participants of all three focus groups on knowledge about the other party to evaluate the other party's trustworthiness.

In addition, findings might indicate an impact of culturally distinct conceptions of time on the development of trust in intercultural business settings. Since *calculus-based trust* is established due to contractual facts and a fear of sanctions and punishment (Greenberg, 2011; Greenberg & Baron, 2008; Rousseau et al., 1998), a rather short time span seems to be required to develop business relationships (Harris & Dibben, 1999). *Identification-based trust*, on the other hand, is based on intense relationships and a deep understanding of the other party's wants and desires to allow *identification-based trust* to develop (Greenberg, 2011; Greenberg & Baron, 2008). Therefore, a longer time span seems to be required to establish *identification-based trust*.

Similar findings are reported by Sullivan and Peterson (1982), who examined trust associated factors in Japanese-American joint ventures. The authors highlight that "[f]rom a Japanese viewpoint, if the partners have mutual trust, then it is unnecessary to cover all contingencies through formal legal contracts" (Sullivan & Peterson, 1982, p. 30). Furthermore, the use of legal documents is considered evidence of mistrust from a Japanese perspective, and trust is increased by mutual discussion (Sullivan & Peterson, 1982). American managers, on the other hand, "... prefer to minimize the ambiguity by formal contracts providing for binding arbitration over areas of conflict" (Sullivan & Peterson, 1982, p. 30). Although Sullivan and Peterson's (1982) study examines Japan and USA, their findings can be considered as crucial for this study. Since Japan and China, with similarly high rankings on Hofstede's long-term orientation dimensions, and Germany and USA with similarly low rankings on Hofstede's long-term orientation dimension, demonstrate a similar divergence in regard to their long- or short-term orientation, findings can be utilized

in comparison to this research project. The following table presents a comparison of China, Japan, Germany, and USA on Hofstede's (2001) long-term orientation dimension.

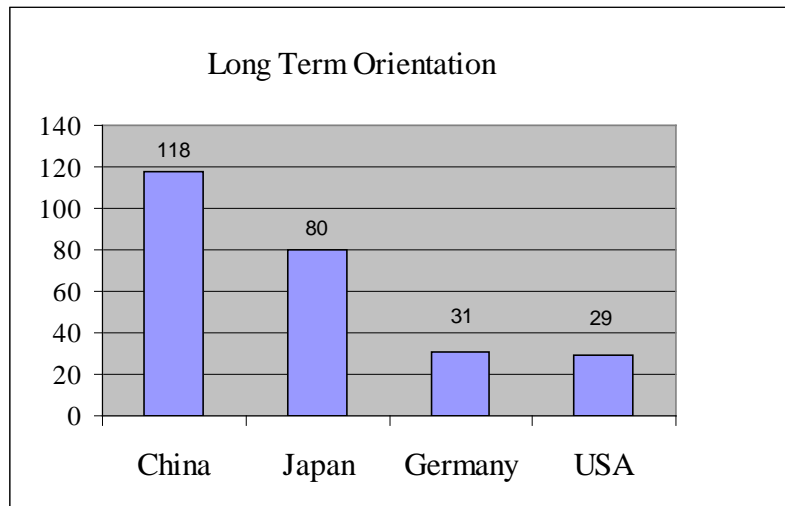


Figure 4: The dimension of long-term orientation (on the basis of Hofstede, 2001)

Ambiguity

The Chinese 'meandering' or ambiguous communication style is typical for a high-context communication culture, as emphasis is placed on the context and implicit statements to transmit the meaning of a message (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Hall, 1977). The ambiguity of high-context communication, therefore, demands a much higher degree of interpretation from the conversational counterpart. Woo and Prud'homme (1999) discuss the ambiguity of the Chinese communication style in relation to the concept of *face*, and point out that the Chinese less direct approach "... is a result of feeling that it is impolite to reject a request, or to turn someone or something down outright, especially if the request is made in the presence of other people" (p. 319). However, findings suggest that the Chinese participants did not perceive the direct communication style as *face*-threatening or *face*-damaging, and did not feel offended by the direct mode, in the sense of linguistic clarity. The 'pressure' the Chinese participants felt was caused by the time-pressuring approach of the German managers in the second scenario, not so much due to their applied communication style.

Indirectness was associated with politeness by participants of all focus groups but was also suggested to possibly arouse suspicion, which reduces a person's willingness to trust another person. An indirect mode does not necessarily cause suspicion; however, findings indicate that it was perceived more likely to cause suspicion than a direct mode. In one New Zealand participant's words "[t]he Chinese, you could imply that they are trying to hold something back, but to me it's just the way they do business. If anyone is holding something back I would have to, personally, say the Chinese" (Focus group C, p. 4). The indirect and ambiguous communication style of the Chinese, therefore, can easily be misinterpreted by Westerners as insincerity and untrustworthiness (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). However, taking the culture of the Chinese managers in the second scenario into account, New Zealand participants repeatedly mentioned that in this scenario "... it just comes across as if the Chinese just being cautious" (Focus group C, p. 4), and there is nothing that suggests "... that they are being dishonest. Just cautious" (Focus group C, p. 4). Likewise, New Zealand participants pointed out that in general, they would be "... more cautious dealing with the Chinese than Germans" (Focus group C, p. 6), which can be related back to the possibly stereotyping attitude of the New Zealand participants, discussed later on in this chapter.

However, one New Zealand participant noted that the German manager's pressuring approach in the second scenario could also be interpreted as suspicious. This suspicion though, was not in regard to the direct communication style, and the situational context was stressed. It was argued that "[i]f I was going to distrust anybody in this scenario, it probably would be the Germans. Just in this case. The Germans are pushing for the contract to sign" (Focus group C, p. 8). At the same time New Zealand participants noted the significance of the contract again and stressed "... if a German company was going to rip you off, they would do it within the confines of their contract. They would not step outside the contract" (Focus group C, p. 8).

Findings, moreover, indicate a strong 'frustration' of New Zealand and German participants with the indirect and ambiguous communication style of the Chinese. German participants stressed the importance of feedback "... even if it's a negative answer or reply" (Focus group A, 19). In one German participant's words "... you don't get answers of questions you had earlier. I think that's one of the important things for me. Questions and things you talked about it, but they don't refer to that" (Focus group A, p.13). Likewise, one New Zealand participant complained

about the ‘frustrating’ indirectness of the Chinese managers in the second scenario and stated

I just want to keep digging for more. I want more, and I want answers and I would try to push for time lines and deadlines. And trying to get at least some fixed deadlines. So I’m not left completely with nothing. (Focus group C, p. 7)

This ‘frustration’ caused by the ambiguous communication style of the Chinese also lead to an untrustworthy perception of the Chinese managers in the second scenario. German participants stressed they would not trust the Chinese “[b]ecause everything is still open ...” (Focus group A, p. 13), and “I still wouldn’t trust to get critical feedback on time. Or to get critical feedback at all. Which is important” (Focus group A, p. 18). Findings, thus, are in conformity with the literature (Engholm, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Limaye & Victor, 1991) since a preference of the individualistic German and New Zealand participants for open confrontation and open criticism over face-saving strategies can be reported from the focus group discussions. Not being able to discuss business concerns in an open and direct manner and not receiving the desired information and answers to questions, therefore, diminished German and New Zealand participants’ willingness to trust the Chinese in the second and third scenario, resulting in a less trustworthy picture of the Chinese. A negative relationship between indirectness and trust, therefore, might be suggested by the findings.

Although an indirect communication style was suggested to cause suspicion and frustration by German and New Zealand participants, the application of a rather indirect approach was also discussed in regard to politeness concerns. German participants noted “[m]aybe it’s their [the Chinese] way to be polite and they expect the Germans to read between the lines” (Focus group A, p. 10). Findings suggest a correlation between politeness, indirectness, and the need to ‘read between the lines’ in the third scenario, causing difficulties for participants in interpreting the third scenario. While a vast variety of scholars stress the use of a direct approach for Germans, as members of a individualistic, low-context culture (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hall, 1977), participants of all three focus groups reported difficulties in interpreting the German professor’s response in the third scenario, due to an uncertainty as to whether or not he acts in a typically German way, or uses an Asian, polite and *face*-saving strategy, due to the fact that his

counterpart is Chinese. Chinese participants stressed that “[i]f that says in Chinese someone, it means that you are not really interested” (Focus group B, p. 16). Participants of all three focus groups agreed that they considered it most likely that a German would have said ‘no’ if he were not interested. Therefore, New Zealand participants pointed out that the German professor might use “... an Asian way to save face, to really say he’s not really interested” (Focus group C, p. 9). Participants of all three focus groups highlighted the importance of taking the cultural background of the characters in the scenarios into account in order to accurately interpret the meaning of a message, and as a basis for their assessment of trustworthiness.

Owing to the complexity of the third scenario and the difficulties participants of all three focus groups experienced in interpreting the intent of the German professor and the meaning of his reply, no clear conclusions can be drawn from the third scenario. Findings, therefore, suggests that individual perceptions might outbalance a culturally determined interpretation of the third scenario, most likely due to the high complexity of the scenario and the ‘open-ending’. According to the participants “[t]his is difficult, because you could interpret this in a number of ways” (Focus group C, p. 14), referring to the ambiguity of the last sentence.

Honesty and openness

New Zealand and German participants clearly highlighted the importance of honesty and openness to establish trust between parties. It was stated that “... the Germans are being honest, because they are direct” (Focus group C, p. 4), and “... the Germans are stating clearly what they want and what they expect. So, I would say equals trustworthy and honest” (Focus group A, p. 19). Openness was discussed by German and New Zealand participants to impact participants’ perceptions of another person’s trustworthiness, since an open and honest approach was associated with transparency, and the sharing of information.

Since openness is an element of directness and trust, a cognitive link between trust and directness, based on honesty and openness, might be indicated from the German and New Zealand participants’ data, which is of great value for this research project as well as for the field of intercultural communication. Since the explicit statement of facts and the direct exchange of information are crucial characteristics for a low-context communication culture, an impact of culture on participants’ perceptions of trustworthiness can be reported from this research project.

Findings indicate that German and New Zealand participants, as members of rather individualistic, low-context cultures, perceived the utilization of the direct mode as an indication for honesty and trustworthiness, whereas Chinese participants, as members of a rather collectivistic, high-context culture, placed emphasis on relationships in order to establish trust amongst parties, and assess trustworthiness. Furthermore, a direct mode was preferred once a strong relationship is established. The preference of German and New Zealand participants for an honest and direct approach, therefore, might indicate their willingness to trust the other party, as they willingly disclosed crucial information to the other party, and hence, make themselves vulnerable.

Similar findings can be reported from the third scenario. Although the interpretation as to whether the German professor uses a direct mode to state that he wants to go to China but needs to get approval from his university, or he uses an indirect mode to politely indicate that he is not interested, caused much confusion among all participants, findings suggest that the vast majority of participants perceived the German professor as honest as to his availability. Since honesty is a crucial element of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004), German and New Zealand participants argued they would trust the German professor in the third scenario, since the provision of facts and details clearly indicates his honesty and truthfulness.

All German and New Zealand participants, regardless of whether they interpreted the German professor's reply as a direct or indirect message, agreed that they "... don't doubt that the details are correct" (Focus group C, p. 10) and "... the actual details that he has put about the grant and the process he has to go through to get approval to do it, I think he's a hundred percent honest with that" (Focus group C, p. 12). However, one New Zealand participant pointed out that the third scenario has no bearing on trust, since "... trust is more than honesty" (Focus group C, p. 12).

German participants, however, did not distinguish between honesty and trust and perceived the German professor as 'very trustworthy', "[b]ecause of the detail and the explanation" (Focus group A, p. 24). Even the male German participants, who interpreted the German professor's reply as a polite refusal, agreed "... I wouldn't think he's not trustworthy, I just think he has a very friendly way of saying that he's not interested" (Focus group A, p. 24). German female participants, in addition, argued that the reply is "... too detailed to say he isn't interested and just made it up. Because he's really giving the facts" (Focus group A, p. 24). Furthermore, "... giving

details that can be checked ...” (Focus group A, p. 24) was seen as a crucial factor for the German female participants to trust the German professor with regard to his availability. Since speaking the truth is of high priority for Germans, and even more important than paying attention to politeness- or *face*-concerns (Lewis, 2006; Xie & House, 2009; Thomas, 2008), findings suggest that being detected as a liar might be perceived as worse than directly rejecting the invitation of the Chinese professor. Findings, therefore, indicate that the female German participants perceived the German professor as trustworthy owing to the direct, honest, and truthful statement of facts in regard to his availability, as he otherwise would have said ‘no’ if he were not interested. Since openness, in the sense of providing details and facts and sharing information, indicates honesty from a German perspective (Hall, 1977; Triandis, 1995; Lewis, 2006), findings indicate that the vast majority of participants perceived the German professor as trustworthy due to his open and direct communication style, and the general desire of Germans to speak the truth (Lewis, 2006; Xie & House, 2009; Thomas, 2008).

Chinese participants, on the other hand, argued that they trust the German professor, “[b]ecause he told me the truth. Honest to me” (Focus group B, p. 14). The importance of the relationship status between the two professors was highlighted again and Chinese participants pointed out they trust the German professor “[b]ecause he [the Chinese professor] already met him” (Focus group B, p. 13). The relationship status between the two professors, therefore, was mentioned again to account for the Chinese participants’ willingness to trust the German professor.

It was, moreover, mentioned that out of respect for the Chinese professor, the German professor did not directly reject the invitation, but used a polite excuse to demonstrate his respect for the Chinese professor. However, three out of the four Chinese participants stressed that they considered the German professor’s reply as a rejection of his invitation. Additionally, although three out of four Chinese participants described the German professor’s reply as direct, they, at the same time, interpreted the message as a polite rejection of the invitation. Findings, therefore, might suggest that the Chinese participants interpreted the reply as direct, since it was obvious to them that the reply was meant to be a polite rejection.

Cultural stereotyping – familiarity

Although it might be considered stereotyping, participants of all three focus groups pointed out that, in general, they would rather trust the Germans than the Chinese, simply because of the Germans' cultural heritage. One New Zealand participant pointed out "[p]ersonally, I trust the Germans more" (Focus group C, p. 6), owing to their reputation for being reliable and based on personal previous experience. It was explained that "... generally Germans, as a rule, do exactly what they say they do ..." (Focus group C, p. 6). However, participants mentioned "[a]gain, it just comes down to previous experience" (Focus group C, p. 6), which might indicate that New Zealand participants relied on stereotypes as a basis for their perceptions and judgements. Likewise, German participants pointed out that "[b]ecause he is German I really would trust him. If he would be an American, or Kiwi, I wouldn't trust his answers" (Focus group A, p. 24). Since participants based their decision to rather trust the Germans and be more cautious with Chinese on their personal experiences and knowledge of the two cultures, a more trustworthy perception of Germans might be indicated from the findings. However, these indications need to be considered with caution, due to an interpretation based on stereotypical perceptions of the participants.

The findings, nevertheless, might suggest a connection to Lewis' (2006) framework of low-trust and high-trust cultures, as introduced in chapter two. According to Lewis (2006), Germans are members of a rather high-trust culture, meaning Germans tend to trust other people until they prove untrustworthy, Chinese, on the other hand, as members of a rather low-trust culture, tend to be initially suspicious of strangers and to strangers. This perhaps 'stereotypical' classification of the German and Chinese cultures might offer an explanation as to why Germans are considered rather trustworthy by all participants in this study, simply due to their cultural heritage and their reputation for being truthful and reliable.

Familiarity, in addition, was highlighted by German and New Zealand participants to account for a rather trustworthy picture of the Germans. Participants of the German and New Zealand focus group pointed out that

[i]f I would have an alternative of production in Hungary for example, for the same price, I would rather do it there. That's at least a European, Western

country But you would think the business attitudes are similar or more similar than with the Chinese. (Focus group A, p. 14)

Participants further explained that they would instinctively be more wary of the Chinese, just because it's such a different..., because the culture is so different, so foreign to me than say German culture. And it would just come down to, you always got to be more cautious of the unknown. (Focus group C, p. 8)

Since familiarity and uncertainty are elements of trust (Greenberg, 2011), influencing a persons' willingness to trust another person, it is not surprising that German and New Zealand participants, both as inhabitants of Western countries, tend to rather trust the culture they feel more familiar with. In this case, the Germans, in contrast to the Eastern rather unfamiliar Chinese culture.

Moreover, participants highlighted that knowledge about the culture of the counterpart plays a crucial role in helping them interpret the meaning of a message, and thus, for the assessment of another persons' trustworthiness. Chinese participants pointed out that the German professor in the third scenario "... speaks like an Asian ..." (Focus group B, p. 14), which seemed to have an impact on their interpretation of the professor's intentions and the actual meaning of his message. Since Germans are usually characterized, or maybe stereotyped, as honest and speaking the truth (Lewis, 2006), participants of all focus groups pointed out that the German professor would have simply said 'no' if he were not interested. The long and detailed reply to the Chinese professor, therefore, was interpreted by some participants as a polite and *face*-saving way to reject the invitation of the Chinese professor, taking into account that he was communicating with a Chinese. Participants assumed the German professor applied a rather polite and *face*-saving approach since he was dealing with a Chinese.

Participants, therefore, considered the cultural background of a person a significant element to successfully assess the appropriateness of a communication style in a given situation. Whereas the direct approach was considered appropriate and 'normal' in a German or Western context, New Zealand and German participants described the direct mode rather inappropriate in a Chinese environment. Interestingly

enough, Chinese participants did not describe the direct mode as inappropriate, but rather considered it the ‘normal’ approach in business settings.

The research question and sub-questions - Overall discussion and summary

It can be concluded that several factors seemed to influence participants’ notions of a direct communication style and their perceptions of another person’s trustworthiness. The close interconnectedness of cultural specific themes and concepts makes this research project most interesting, however, very complex at the same time.

The discussion and analysis of the findings disclose that the cultural background of participants significantly impacts their perceptions of directness, as well as their consideration of the appropriate degree of directness in a given situation. Findings of all three scenarios contributed to answering the research question and the two sub-questions. However, despite the influence of status and hierarchy considerations, the first scenario proved to be most useful in providing answers to the first research sub-question of this project:

How is a direct communication style interpreted by culturally diverse individuals?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Chinese participants, although members of a collectivistic, high-context culture, demonstrated a preference for a direct mode in the first scenario, and overall did not consider directness, in the sense of linguistic clarity, as *face*-threatening or *face*-damaging. Findings, therefore, are in contrast to predominant views in the literature (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hall, 1977). German and New Zealand participants, on the other hand, although members of individualistic and low-context communication cultures and hence discussed as preferring a direct mode, considered the direct communication style in the first scenario as ‘aggressive’ and ‘impolite’. This research project, therefore, provides interesting findings in regard to culturally determined associations between directness and politeness. In contrast to what might have been suggested by the majority of scholars (Ogiermann, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Oetzel et al., 2001), findings of this research project indicate a connection between directness and impoliteness for the German and New Zealand participants, whereas Chinese participants perceived the direct mode in the first scenario as ‘still polite’ and ‘normal’ for the given situation. As discussed earlier, these findings might be

influenced by the status difference between the two characters in the first scenario. Further research, therefore, is suggested to arrive at valid conclusions.

Overall, participants of all three cultures highlighted that they prefer a direct communication style in business settings. Findings, however, suggest that the appropriate level of directness varies across cultures and is highly situational. Most interesting are the findings that confirm Beamer's (2003) study. Since findings indicate a preference for directness for the Chinese participants once a relationship is established, the use of a direct approach, in turn, since implying proximity, can be used and seen as an indication for trust, and thus, enhance the other person's willingness to trust. The use of an indirect approach, in contrast, might result in reduced willingness to trust the other party, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Indirectness, on the other hand, was associated with politeness by participants of all three cultures. However, findings suggest that an indirect communication style, although perceived as more polite, might negatively impact participants' perceptions of another person's trustworthiness. German and New Zealand participants highlighted that the 'meandering' and ambiguous communication style of the Chinese can cause 'frustration', since German and New Zealand participants as members of rather low-context communication cultures prefer explicit statements over an implicit and ambiguous communication approach. Ogiermann (2009) lends support to this since an indirect approach not only increases the interpretative demand on the conversational counterpart, but from a Western perspective might also be considered devious and manipulative. Moreover, following the comment made earlier, indirectness, from a Chinese perspective, might reduce a person's willingness to trust, since the indirect approach can imply that no relationship is established yet. Since *guanxi* is central to business relationships, not having *guanxi* might reduce a person's willingness to trust another person, or party, from a Chinese perspective.

Although findings of all three scenarios were taken into consideration, findings from scenario two were particularly relevant to the second research sub-question:

What specific elements and concepts influence participants' perceptions of another person's trustworthiness?

Findings suggest that participants' perceptions might be influenced by a variety of contributing factors, impacting participants' perceptions of another person's

trustworthiness and the assessment of trust. The close interconnectedness of diverse concepts, therefore, led to a highly interesting discussion of the findings.

Findings suggest that the concept of *guanxi* and the conception of time unconsciously influence participants' cognition of trust. The concept of *guanxi*, with its roots in Confucianism and due to the significant role Confucian values still play in the Chinese culture, might impact the establishment and assessment of trust, from a Chinese perspective. Chinese participants highlighted the significance of the relationship to conduct business in China, which can be referred back to the collectivistic nature of the Chinese culture. The importance of the relationship may also explain the longer time span required for establishing trusting relationships and start business deals or joint ventures, as stressed by participants of all three cultures. Since Chinese business people focus on long-term and future outcomes of business relations, Germans, on the other hand, emphasize short-term and financial outcomes, in accordance with Hofstede's (2001) long-term orientation dimension.

The signing of the contract in the second scenario highlighted the distinction between German and Chinese business manners, and findings, therefore, might indicate an impact on the establishment of trust. Whereas the German participants understood the signing of the contract as the closing procedure to finalize the business deal, Chinese participants, in contrast, considered the contract as a starting point to commence deepening the relationships before the business deal is conducted. Likewise, whereas German participants considered the signing of the contract as a sign for trust, and hence reinforce the German's willingness to trust the Chinese, the Chinese participants, in contrast, based their decision whether or not to trust the other party on the relationship between the two parties, and the contract was not perceived to have any bearing on the assessment of the other party's trustworthiness. Following up on the previous discussion in this chapter, findings, therefore, might suggest a reliance of the German managers in the second scenario on *calculus-based trust*, whereas the Chinese managers were considered to rely on *identification-based trust* to conduct business.

Overall, findings indicate a link between a direct communication style and the establishment of trust. The following discussion aims to answer the main research question:

How does directness in intercultural communication affect the perception of trust among individuals with different cultural profiles?

The cross-cultural comparison of the focus group discussions from this research project has produced interesting findings in regard to culturally determined preferences for directness and its impact on trust. Two key findings of this research project can be summarized to answer the main research question. Firstly, findings suggest a positive relationship between directness and trust for participants of all three cultures examined in this study. Secondly, findings from the German and New Zealand focus groups indicate the likelihood of a negative relationship between indirectness and trust for the given scenarios.

Although an indirect communication style does not necessarily indicate untrustworthiness, findings from the German and New Zealand focus groups suggest that an indirect mode reduces participants' willingness to trust another person and results in a less trustworthy perception of the other party. These findings are supported by Ogiermann's (2009) study, which indicate that an indirect approach might be perceived devious and manipulative, as the true intentions of the speaker are stated implicitly, and thus, can be perceived as ambiguous and uncertain. From the perspective of members from a low-context communication culture, therefore, the implicit transmission of the meaning of a message was described as frustrating, and as creating suspicion. Findings, therefore, suggest that the perceived suspicion and the uncertainty about the true intentions of the Chinese in the scenarios diminished the German and New Zealand participants' willingness to trust the Chinese in scenario two and three.

A direct communication style, on the other hand, was perceived by participants of all three cultures to account for a trustworthy perception of the individuals or parties discussed in the scenarios. The direct mode was perceived to account for trustworthiness as it indicates openness and honesty. Openness was discussed by German and New Zealand participants as a key element to assess another person's trustworthiness and influence their willingness to trust, and is also a vital component of the definition of directness, as defined in this research project. Since openness indicates truthfulness, from a Western perspective at least, the open and detailed provision of facts was considered to imply truthfulness of the German professor in the third scenario. Although interpretation as to whether the German professor in the third scenario used a direct or indirect mode differed among participants, the vast majority of participants perceive the German professor as honest due to the detailed description of his situation. Findings, therefore, indicate that the

explicit (LC) communication style reveals the 'true' intentions, which facilitates participants' willingness to trust another person or party. Moreover, the stereotypical picture of Germans to generally speaking the truth, in line with a 'reputation' for being honest and trustworthy, resulted in a rather trustworthy perception of the German characters in the second and third scenario.

Furthermore, findings indicate that a direct approach might be used by German business people owing to efficiency reasons, whereas Chinese business people prefer a direct communication style once a strong relationship is established. Due to diverse business manners and a focus on different outcomes, with German business people focusing on short-term financial outcomes, in contrast to Chinese business people focusing on long-term outcomes and future relationships/*guanxi*, culturally determined diverse preferences for different communication approaches might be indicated from this research project, partially owing to culturally diverse business attitudes regarding the desired time frame for conducting business.

To sum up, it can be concluded that a direct communication approach was perceived as more trustworthy than an indirect approach by participants of all three cultures examined in this research project. Findings, therefore, might suggest a universal positive impact of directness on the perception of trust and trustworthiness. However, the reasons why trust and the willingness to trust are influenced by a direct communication style depend on culturally diverse assumptions. Findings indicate that individual's culturally determined underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs influence their perceptions of trust and their willingness to trust. Since the assessment of trust is based on culturally diverse values and beliefs, diverse concepts are decisive for their assessment of and willingness to trust. Hence, the concepts that impact participants' perceptions, thus, the reason why directness impacts the establishment of trust, varies across cultures.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

The following chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part briefly summarizes key points from the previous discussion chapter and provides an overall conclusion. The second part discusses limitations of this research project, followed by suggestions for future research.

Summary

This research project generated useful data to successfully answer the research question. Since the research question and the two sub-questions have been answered in detail in the previous chapter, only a brief summary of key findings is presented in this section.

It can be concluded that findings suggest an impact of directness on the establishment and assessment of trust across cultures. A variety of concepts were identified to influence participants' perceptions of the direct communication style, and their assessment of trustworthiness. However, it needs to be mentioned that contextual and situational factors play a significant role in researching and analysing intercultural communication and trust. Findings, therefore, need to be considered in regard to the given scenarios. The strong interconnectedness of a variety of concepts causes a very interesting, however, at the same time very complex discussion of the topic.

In summary, an indirect communication style was considered to be more polite and appropriate for business settings. However, findings suggest that a too indirect communication approach might result in a less trustworthy perception of the other party due to a higher uncertainty about the true intentions of the other party. A direct communication style, on the other hand, can under some circumstances be perceived as impolite, but increases participants' willingness to trust the other party, based on an open and honest sharing of information. Findings, therefore, indicate that the degree of directness in a conversation might be decisive for the assessment of politeness as well as assessment of appropriateness in a given situation.

The relationship aspect was found to be highly important for the Chinese participants, and findings indicate a critical link to trust. Whereas the relationship aspect was not considered to be decisive for the German and New Zealand participants, Chinese participants highlighted its significance for establishing trusting

relationships, including personal ties of friendship, in order to establish successful business relationships. Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the Chinese focus group indicating a preference for a direct communication style for the Chinese participants. Findings might indicate that Chinese participants prefer a direct communication style, once a relationship is established. Conversely, a conclusion might be drawn that an indirect communication style indicates that no relationship or *guanxi* has been established as yet. This implication might lead to a reduced willingness of the Chinese participants to trust another party, since relationships were discussed as crucial in order to start business relationship and trust another party.

Overall, this research project provided useful insight into culturally determined differences, and the cross-cultural comparison of findings suggest that different types of trust might be decisive for culturally diverse participants. Since the establishment of trust is crucial for successful business relationships, and complexity increases when dealing with culturally diverse members, researching elements impacting the establishment of trust and providing a basis for improvements can be seen as critical for enhancing the success of international business.

Limitations

Although this research project produced interesting and informative results that can be utilized to improve the success of intercultural business relationships, several limitations need to be taken into considerations.

As already acknowledged in the research design chapter, limitations can be seen in the small scale of this research project. However, since this research project is explorative in nature, this qualitative study is less concerned with the representativeness of a population, but rather with the generalization of findings to the theory. Moreover, since the sample only included students, findings need to be generalized with caution, and owing to the high complexity of the topic, conclusions can only be drawn so similar settings.

Moreover, with the researcher's German cultural background, it can be considered likely that culturally determined and deeply rooted values and beliefs unconsciously influenced the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the findings from a Western perspective. However, since every person belongs to a certain culture, this kind of research will always be influenced by the cultural background of the

researcher. Objectivity, therefore, is somewhat limited owing to the nature of the topic.

An additional limitation of this research project can be seen in the likelihood for a researcher bias in interpreting and analyzing the data of this research project. Since no independent other person assisted in analyzing the findings, hence no cross-checking of the analyzed data against another person took place, the likelihood of the appearance of a researcher bias might be the result. In order to mitigate the effect of personal or cultural influences on the interpretation and analysis of the data, as many quotes as possible were used from the focus groups, to keep close to participants' original words.

Areas for future research

Various areas for further research have been identified in this research project. The following section suggests areas which could be fruitfully researched to enhance the understanding of culturally determined differences in participants' perceptions of directness and its impact on trust.

Although the methodological approach of this research project was revealed to be highly useful to gather the data aimed for, a recommendation for future research might include the application of the same methodological approach with a wider scale. The data collection design can be utilized as a basis for future research, including a larger number of participants and participants with a business background and work experience in the field of international business or/and international management. Moreover, future research might utilize data and/or researcher triangulation to verify the data. It is recommended that further research assures an independent other person to analyze findings in order to avoid the appearance of a researcher bias.

Another topic of interest could be seen in the gender difference in interpretations of participants of the German focus group that might have become apparent. Due to the small scale of this research project and due to the fact that the Chinese focus group only consisted of male participants, no clear findings and hence no indication for a gender difference in interpretation can be reported from this study. Further research, therefore, is recommended to investigate the likelihood of a gender specific interpretation of the direct communication approach.

Since this research project suggests interesting findings regarding Hall's (1977) contexting model due to an indicated preference for a direct mode by the Chinese participants, further empirical research on Hall's (1977) contexting model is recommended.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Form



Information Form

Intercultural communication and trust

My name is Melanie Disse, and I am currently enrolled in the Master of International Communication programme at Unitec New Zealand. To complete the degree I have to conduct a research project and write a thesis. My research topic investigates the impact of intercultural communication on the development of trust in intercultural relationships.

The aim of my project:

The aim of my research project is to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between intercultural communication and the impact on the development of trust in intercultural relationships.

I request your participation in the following way:

I would like to ask you to participate in a focus group interview and talk about:

- Your perceptions of intercultural communication in specific communication incidents,
- The impact of different communication styles on your perception of another persons' trustworthiness, and
- Your perceptions and experiences in relation to the presented communication incidents.

The focus group will take about 60-90 minutes and will take place at the media centre room of the Department of Communication Studies (172-2028). I will, with your permission, audiotape the focus group interviews and transcribe them later. All features that could identify you will be removed and the tapes used will be erased once the transcription is done.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected computer at Unitec New Zealand for five years and can only be accessed by me and my supervisors.

Please contact me if you have any concerns about the project, via email

(melanie.disse@freenet.de) or phone (+64-21 02540611). You may also contact my

supervisors at Unitec New Zealand. My supervisors are Simon Peel, email

speer@unitec.ac.nz or phone +64-9-815 4321 ext. 8650 and Evangelia Papoutsaki, email

epapoutsaki@unitec.ac.nz or phone +64-9-815 4321 ext. 8746.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2010-1117)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 28.09.2010 to 28.09.2011. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix B: Consent Form



Focus Group Consent Form

Intercultural communication and trust

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understood the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I do not have to be part of this if I do not want to. I also understand that I can withdraw from the research project at any time during the focus group interview.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and will be made anonymous. None of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher, as well as the other focus group participants. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec New Zealand for a period of 5 years.

I understand that my focus group interview will be audio taped and transcribed.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

I allow the researcher to audiotape the focus group interview:

Yes ☐

No ☐

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Project Researcher:

Date:

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER 2010-1117

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 28.09.2010 to 28.09.2011. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (phone +64-9-815 4321 ext. 7248). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix C: Focus Group Guideline Question

Scenario one:

- How would you describe the manager's communication style? (Would you consider this a rather direct and straightforward approach to communicate with someone?)
- What do you think is the reason the U.S. manager is using such (straightforward and direct) approach?
- Do you think the manager's behaviour was appropriate? Why, why not? Why do you think it is inappropriate behaviour?
- Would you feel insulted by the manager's (direct) communication style? By his words and (direct) statements?
- What do you think the U.S. manager's intentions are? Do you believe him that he only wants to find out what is going on? Or something else? What else?
- What exactly did you like or not like about the manager's communication style? Was it due to the words used? Or simply not appropriate in this context (blaming a subordinate)?
- Would/do you prefer a direct communication style over an indirect one in this situation? Why, why not? Reasons?

Scenario two:

- What do you think are the reasons the German managers insist on signing the contract now (pushing so hard)?
- What do you think are the reasons the Chinese managers are talking more about establishing relationship ties instead of contractual issues of the business deal? Would you consider this a 'normal' behaviour? Would you do it the same way? Communicate in the same way?
- How would you describe the Germans' communication style? Do you think the German managers communicated in a straightforward and direct fashion? What is the message, what do you think they are trying to say/communicate? How would you interpret their message? Why do you think are they communicating in this way?

- How would you describe the Chinese' communication style? Do you think the Chinese are straightforward and direct?
- Do you think that both parties are honest and open with each other? What makes you believe that are being honest? Any specific elements? What is the reason? For what reason do you (don't) trust them, are confident in their words? Are you confident that the Germans do not take advantage of you?
- Does the communication style used by the parties influence your confidence in the words and actions of both parties (of Chinese/of Germans)?
- Would you consider the Germans as trustworthy, as being open and honest, due to their direct and straightforward approach? Would you trust the Germans due to their straightforward/direct approach? Does the communication style influence whether or not you would consider the German managers as trustworthy? What aspects/elements exactly? Any specific aspects/elements?
- Do you think they are open and honest with you when they are so direct? Or would you perceive it as openness and honesty when they are so direct/communicate so direct?
- Would you consider the Chinese as trustworthy due to their (indirect) approach/response? Would you trust the Chinese due to their indirect approach?
- Do you think the Chinese are open and honest with you when they communicate so indirectly/talk around the point? What do you think are the reasons why the Chinese
- From your point of view, does the communication style both parties use/apply (way Germans and Chinese communicate; words they use; implicit-explicit) have an influence on whether or not you would trust them? Does it influence your willingness to build a (trusting) relationship with them (Germans-Chinese)?
- Does the communication style used by the parties influence your perception of their trustworthiness? And your willingness to trust the German managers?
- What do you think are both parties trying to communicate?

- Overall, on a scale 1 – 7 (with 1 being completely dishonest and 7 being completely honest), to what extent do you believe that the Germans are being honest with the Chinese?
- On a scale from 1-7 (1 being completely untrustworthy and 7 being completely trustworthy), how trustworthy would you consider the Germans to be? Do you think the German managers are trustworthy?
- Put yourselves in this situation/If you were in this situation: Would you start a serious business relationship with the Germans-Chinese? Why, why not? Does their communication style make you more or less interested in working with the German-Chinese Corporation? Or does it not matter (at all)? Does the way they responded (communicated) have an impact on your decision to trust them, or not trust them?
- What would your assessment of trust or trustworthiness be based on? Does the response (way of communication) have an influence (on your decision-assessment)?
- Do you think that the Germans would screw the Chinese over? Or have something to hide?

Scenario three:

- Would you trust Dr. Müller that he needs to check with his organization? What do you think is the reason he said this?
- Do you think Dr. Müller is open and honest with you in regard to his availability? (that he has to check with the institution due to his new contract) Do you believe that Dr. Müller is telling the truth about his availability?
- Would you expect to hear from Dr. Müller/Dr. Xi again, or rather not? Why – why not?
- Do you/would you perceive Dr. Müller's communication style as direct or rather indirect? Too direct – indirect? Why? What makes it direct-indirect?
- Do you think too much information provided here by Dr. Müller? Do you think he is more or rather less trustworthy/are you more or less confident in his words due to his long/elaborate answer/reply? Taking the lengths of the reply into account, do you think this is a direct or indirect answer?
- What do you think Dr. Müller was trying to communicate? Did he communicate his message clearly or do you think the message that Dr. Müller communicated could be interpreted/perceived differently by different people?

- Do you think Dr. Müller communicated a different message than what he expressed in words (implicitly stated message)? (Or rather straightforward and direct message with no room for misinterpretation)
- How would you in this situation interpret Dr. Müller's response/message? (As open and honest statement of their availability or rather excuse and polite way of saying No (not interested; saying No without saying no)
- Does the message/response influence your willingness to trust Dr. Müller, as to his availability? Or influence whether or not you would consider Dr. Müller as trustworthy?
- What would your assessment of trust or trustworthiness be based on? Does the response have an influence on your assessment/decision?
- Does Dr. Müller's communication style influence your perception of his trustworthiness (in this situation)? Or your willingness (whether or not you would trust) to trust Dr. Müller in this situation?
- Overall, on a scale 1 – 7 (with 1 being completely dishonest and 7 being completely honest), to what extent do you believe that Dr. Mueller is being honest with Dr. Xi?
- On a scale from 1-7 (1 being completely untrustworthy and 7 being completely trustworthy), how trustworthy would you consider Dr. Mueller to be? Do you think Dr. Mueller is trustworthy?
- Would you contact Dr. Müller again? Why – not?

Recommendations:

- What could Dr. Müller do differently so you are confident in trusting him/that he is telling the truth about his availability? What would have to be different (in your opinion) so you would trust the Dr. Müller?
- What do you think is the reason for this intercultural misunderstanding/miscommunication?
- What recommendations would you have as to avoid miscommunication in the future?

**Appendix D: Original intercultural incident number 69 from Cushner and
Brislin (1996, p. 163)**

Dr. Xuang Xi, who worked at an important economic planning institute in Beijing (China), was on a study tour of the United States when he contacted Dr. Ronald Hastings, who was affiliated with a similar organization in New York City. Hastings, the author of several well-received books, was a high-status economist and considered a leading authority in the field of economic forecasting based on microeconomic predictors.

Dr. Xi invited Dr. Hastings to come to China for 2 months to give seminars on microeconomic variables in forecasting, with special attention to using data sets available in China. Dr. Hastings responded, "I'm interested, but I have to check the invitation with the administrators here in this [American] organization. The organization just received a grant that frees me from any teaching responsibilities for 3 years, and that's great because I can devote full time to research and writing. But I don't know the details of what that grant allows, for instance, time away from New York to go to China as well as a more teaching-oriented than research-oriented 2 months in China. So I'll check with the administrators here to get their approval." Dr. Hastings then ended his meeting with Dr. Xi, thinking that it had gone well. However, Dr. Hastings never heard again from Dr. Xi.

Appendix E: Transcript of focus group A (Germany)

Focus group A (Germany) – audio transcript

Date: 10.11.2010, 1-3 pm.

Participants: six Participants, two male and four female students.

Min = minute

Transcript:

- Me: Ok the questions I'm going to ask you on the DVD as well as on the scenarios, I'd like to ask you to answer from your own personal or cultural point of view. Like, what you would do or what you think is going on there. I don't want you to ..., I had a pilot and they started saying things like, "If I were Chinese...", so I don't want you to answer in this way. So just say it from your own personal point of view. What you think is going on. Cool. Any questions so far?

- Me: No, cool. Well, let's start with the DVD scenario.

1-1:36 min, showing of DVD.

- Me: Ok, that's a really short one, but that was it. How would you describe the communication style of the manager? Who was talking to the employee?
- Was pretty direct and unfriendly.
- He talked down and pretty straightforward.
- A little bit aggressive.
- He was creating fear.
- I would say he was really angry and he showed it.
- Me: OK.
- He showed that he has power and that he is in the hierarchy.
- He put pressure on her. Like how he looked at her. Putting pressure on her.
- Yeah I had the feeling he was starting putting pressure on her when she was passive, she didn't really wanted to tell who's responsible.
- Yeah good idea.
- And then he started pressuring her. Because in the beginning he wasn't friendly, he only stated the problem and then she started not really giving him the answers he wanted to have.
- Me: And what do you think why is he communicating in that way? Why is he using such an approach to talk to her? Why is he so aggressive as you said?
- Because he's the boss.
- I think what you said because he's angry for some reason I think....
- Ya, he wanted an answer. I think he was just pushing for an answer.
- And I would say it's ... , it would be the usual way in Western cultures. Although maybe kind of chiefs nowadays would be trying to be more polite and friendly, but he asked a direct question and she didn't answer in the same way.

3:48 min

- Me: OK. Do you think his behaviour or his communication style was appropriate in this situation?

- I think it's not helpful because he obviously needs the advertisement report if he needs it, he probably should be pro-active rather than looking for the responsible person, because you still will have to get it done. So my approach would never be to find the responsible person and to go straight forward and pointing fingers at someone.
- But then it's not his task to do the advertisement and maybe he's pressured by someone else, so he needs the result. So he's only ... it's like the food chain, he is giving the pressure to the next person responsible. So if he has a position where he collects all the work and then has to do something with it. But it's not his task to do work for someone else. Only he needs it in a correct way, so he can continue with his work.
- Interesting.
- What I find, he could have just sit down and talk on her level. Instead of talking down to her. Like he's really standing and talking in front of her.
- It's really unfair, because she wasn't the one who produced the advertisement report. So it's like being annoyed with the wrong person.
- I think it was counter-productive. Because they still have to do the report. If you want to produce something it's not a good, appropriate behaviour in a team. So when she said we produced it as a team, he probably should have said ok let's sit together now with the team and let's do it again. Let's see where the problems are. But he was trying to point out the responsible person. That probably doesn't help because it creates fear which is counter-productive. She would just get afraid of losing that position rather than thinking about the problem.

6 min

- Me: Ya, fair enough. So, would you feel insulted by his communication style if you were in her position?
- Well I would have preferred if he had said there are things we can improve than just saying "it's a disaster".
- But if he's always like that than you get used to it. And get on with it. It's just his style. Maybe he's a decent person.
- Honestly, I would have felt awkward, because it's kind of..., it seems to me he is talking bad behind the back of someone else. He can say that the work was crap or it wasn't sufficient or whatever, but he should say it to the person responsible and not to someone else. I wouldn't have a problem with a communication style like that if he addresses the right person.
- Ya, I think it was easier for him to address his anger for the not responsible person. That's a good point.
- Because then on the other side, you could have come up with "Yeah, I've got this report, I wasn't really happy". It's ... that's not strong enough because the work wasn't good. They are under time pressure. So it's ok to be straightforward and direct. But still be polite and definitely to address the right person and not anyone in the department because that's not the right way to do it.
- He could have said it or get the people responsible together and then talk about it.
- Yeah.
- Instead of just talking to one person and he wasn't really sure if she was responsible for it or not.

- He could have just asked who is responsible and when she said it was someone in the department I don't know at the moment and he'd said find out and make that person call me. Or set up a meeting.
- Maybe it was easier for him to get off his anger at that moment, because he just can talk about it and you don't have to talk about it to the responsible person.
- But that's not professional.
- Yeah that's not professional.
- And if he has a management position, or leading position, I would expect someone to know what he's doing.

8:24 min

- I think it's ok to say it's a disaster, I don't have a problem with that. I like people that place their opinion. It's just the point of pointing the finger to someone that's responsible I think that's wrong at that point.
- Yeah and I imagine you come to work and someone else says you know the boss was just here he said your work was total crap. It's that's something I'd like to hear personally from my boss and not from someone else in the department. Because something like that spreads so if he's angry that's ok but he should really talk to the right person. Because if it's a disaster, he can't white wash it and say it was ok but you should improve. That's kind of crap. Direct is ok but ...
- Yeah it's not very nice for her to this...
- Yeah and it's definitely not nice for the guy who's really responsible for it. Because he will hear from her and not from the boss.
- And he should know either. He should know who's responsible for this and who authorized it.

9:45 min

- Me: So when he is saying this to her, what do you think his intentions are? Do you think he really just wants to find out who's responsible? Or what do you think why is he so straightforward and direct in this situation?
- It seemed he just had a really bad day and he just needed someone to let his anger out at.
- Me: So you think he just had a really bad day.
- That's how it came across. If I were the secretary I would have thought that's what happened.
- Me: So you wouldn't see that as a regular or normal communication style?
- No.
- No, I hope not.
- I think it happens but it shouldn't.
- I think he wouldn't keep his position for very long if he would continue like this.
- I think in modern companies it shouldn't happen.
- Well I had bosses like that and worse and worse!
- Yeah it still happens... It seems to me like the old school management.
- Well, it depends, they are all human and if they have a bad day and one of their direct bosses or middle management or whatever, one of the directors put pressure on them...
- And worse than that probably.

- Me: Ok, so if he wouldn't have a bad day and that was just him talking to someone. Just cutting out the 'bad day'.
- He's using her as an outlet for his anger. And that's not professional. No matter where you are in a company, if you are customer representative than you can't deal with customers like that only because you had a bad day. You still have to follow certain norms. I would say that's a really bad example.
- Me: Ok, so you said before that you like it when someone is direct, do you think that he's just too direct? Or is it... do you like it that he's direct, but he's just too direct?
- Just the tone I think.
- Yeah just the tone and the way he, yeah.
- Me: ok. Yeah I think that's scenario 1. Thanks for your answers that was quite nice. Do you have any questions on this scenario?
- What's the end of the story?
- Me: That's what I have to find out. Ha-ha. No, your answers were petty sweet.
- I thought her reaction was quite nice, because she didn't give him the name of the responsible colleague because that would seem like telling on someone.
- She was quite professional.
- Yeah, she was professional. She said I will find out and I will call you.
- Maybe she has to deal more often with this person. Ha-ha
- Yeah.
- Because she didn't point the finger and said it wasn't me, it was that guy.
- Me: What do you think why she said this? Why did she try to keep it on the team level?
- She mentioned that it was teamwork, in the first place. So it wasn't only one person responsible for it. Because she said something she edit it? Or she did something with it?
- Me: Yeah "we all did it together".
- I think she really was just professional, she wanted to talk to the team and they wanted to decide how to react on it.
- And it shows that the team is very together. That they work as a team and act as a team.
- Maybe he needed someone responsible and maybe there wasn't really someone responsible, maybe he needed a person for the person he has to report to.
- She tried to calm him down by saying I will find out and call you back.

14.10-14.15 min inaudible.

- Me: Ok, I would like to ask you to read the first written scenario again. I emailed it to you but just have a look at it and read it once more again to refresh your mind. And then we can talk about it.

14.40-16.42 min participants read scenario 1.

- Me: Ok, did you all read it? Cool. So, what do you think are the reasons the German managers insist on signing the deal and why do you think are they pushing so hard? Why do you think they want the Chinese to sign the deal now?
- Because of the money, it's for profit. It's very spelled out. They worked out everything and they want to start.
- It's like the German manager said 'time is money' so they want to have everything black and white on the contract. They seem to be in completely

different stages of the negotiation. It seems for the Chinese it's just starting and the Germans are kind of finished with everything and now we can sign off the contract and then we can start working together. They looked up all the facts and they are fine with it. Whereas the Chinese kind of ...

- Yeah the Germans have done everything and it's just about you to say yes. And do it now.
- I think they also have different expectations. Like the Germans think they do a joint venture whereas the Chinese think they want to sell their product in China. Is it just your style or did I misunderstand that?
- Me: No, no, no, they do have a joint venture of the two companies but they do want to sell the product in China as well.
- So it's on top of it?
- Me: Ya, it's just a joint venture and selling the product in China will be different than selling a product in Germany. That's why they said this.
- A joint venture should be when everyone gets a part.
- Me: Ya, they should be equal.
- So what's the Chinese wing of the situation?
- Me: Well, it's the same. They come together and negotiate the joint venture.
- So they sell their stuff in Germany as well?
- Me: They produce it together, so they will have one end product. And they just sell it.
- Ah, ok.
- It seems like the relationship aspect is less important for the Germans. They are looking for the facts, like the company is so and so big, we looked at the market and whatever. Whereas the Chinese emphasize the relationship aspect, like we have to get to know each other better and then we can decide if we are going to work together.
- To come back to your question, it's probably just part of the bigger plan to close that deal. But they haven't done their homework. They don't understand how business is done in China. So what happened is, it sounds like he read a little bit about it so he knows trust is important in a relationship and important in China, and he says well we're putting all the money in and then we will trust them. But that's German thinking, not Chinese thinking. So he just hasn't researched it properly. And that's why it comes to that complete still stand. Because all the Chinese are interested at that point is the relationship and nothing else. Before they do anything. Number one is to form the relationship. That's what happens.
- Do you think the Germans are trying to do business by German standards? In China.
- Ja, in this case. And nothing wrong with that but you obviously have to, if you go to China you have to really research how they do the business. And I mean we know that, you guys know that in China without knowing the people first they won't talk to you about money or business. So it's just a bad mistake, really. And probably comes across really arrogant and rude.
- And I think they didn't learn because their answer from the Germans is then, we can visit after we closed the deal. So that's very strange.
- Ha, ya and they look slightly confused... That's the deal, all about the money.
- Ya, we can meet but first let's have the deal.

- I had the expression that the Chinese expected the CEO to be a bigger part of the negotiations than he is. He seems to be the head of the company so he is supposed to be there in China. And do the dealings, whereas Mr. Meier is a manager and it seems that it's more important for the Chinese to speak with the top dog then with someone in the middle management.
- I think the Germans know they don't really in the deal process they don't really see the Chinese as equal partners. They try to put their view over everything and that's the way you have to go and that's the way we go. And not like well you might have some issues with how we want to go, let's see how we can deal with it. Not equal partners in the deal process.

22:09 min

- Yeah they just deal with them because they need them. Maybe they would be more happy if they don't need the Chinese.
- I wouldn't actually see it like this. Not as strong. I would just say they see it more from a financial point of view. It hasn't got to do something with networking. Partnership is just business. I wouldn't say it's not on the same level, but they're just see each other on a business level.
- After the first reply you would think, well they have to start thinking, and not going further with you...
- I would agree with you. Although he says "equally fair management" but he says "AB Corporation is providing capital and expertise", that seems to me to be the most important thing and kind of you guys are going to put the toys together. So like you only have to manufacture the whole thing. Capital and expertise seem to me the most important points in my eyes.
- Well if you read it, "you should have had enough time to get your lawyers to check everything". Well, maybe that's not the important part for them. And if they want to go a different way, they should maybe think about it and not say put your lawyers on that and ...
- I seems like the Germans are trying to dictate their way. Yeah because he said "we sent you the contract 2 months ago, you should have had enough time" but he didn't ask them in the beginning how long do you need? Because maybe things take longer in China, so they need more time. But it seems like the German manager is there to have the contract signed and the Chinese expectations are the complete opposite, because they think ok we are starting now to negotiate. It seems like there hasn't enough communication happened in between.
- But I still think they talk on the same level. I agree with you it's like they want to dictate them but I still think they see themselves on the same level. It's not like we are generous to come to your country, it's just business level I think. What the Germans think.

24:26 min

- It's a little bit bossy.
- Yeah
- Because he says "I think we should be ready to close the deal by the end of the week", so he's not even asking.
- Yeah he is bossy, I think he is bossy. I think they put more money in than the Chinese but I still think they think they can do it because from a business point of view, they are the stronger ones. Because they put more money in. I just want to say I don't think that they look down at them. I just think that they are

stronger because they got more money and they may be bigger. So they think they have the right to do it. But it's not like they have come to our county... That's what I think, but I might be wrong.

- Wouldn't be the CEO there to sign the contract and all that stuff? If they wouldn't look down, to me it seems like, we are providing expertise, capital, and you are only going to manufacture the parts.
- Me: No, no, no, that's not what they are saying. They are saying Germans provide capital and expertise and the Chinese equipment and facilities. Well, it's the whole factory basically, the whole facilities.
- But if I say I have the expertise in something, I would assume someone else doesn't have it.
- Yeah that's not equal.
- Yeah they are going to give you the instructions how to work and that goes through the whole conversation. It seems like they are directing their ways.
- But they are confused as well. So I think they are pretty much surprised as well. I still think, I mean you are all right, I think the same, they are bossy, but I still think that they don't feel that they communicate wrong. Because they didn't expect what happened.
- So that all comes back to they haven't done their homework.
- Yeah they haven't done their homework that's right.
- Yeah but the German guy says in the end since all relevant information is readily available... He doesn't ask the Chinese do you have all the information you need? He says now you have everything so just sign and then we can start.
- Me: So by saying that, how would you describe the German communication style?
- It's direct. But I actually find that the Chinese are quite direct as well in saying oh well, you actually don't understand us. That is quite a direct statement and I don't think that Chinese would actually say that in my experience from working with the Chinese they wouldn't say no you actually misunderstood us, because that would make you loose face. To say look, you don't understand what we are doing.
- That's actually what I meant in the beginning as well, they say you need us for selling your product, so I just think they see themselves as a strong partner as well.
- To me it's just like two different points of communication. For Germans it's like we need a signature first and after I have the signature, after I have the deal signed I'm willing to get to know you and willing to spend time with you to socialize, to, you know, discuss more, because we have finalized the deal. I'm sure that we are going to do this. Whereas for the Chinese, they need to get to know the people first. And afterwards they can sign the deal. It's just a different approach, I guess. And they just obviously misunderstand that. But I think it would be a quite Westernized thing for a Chinese to say, look, you don't actually understand China, I understand that you don't understand us, but we need to do things differently.

27:52 min

- And their time scale seems to be completely off, because the Germans say within a week and the Chinese say the CEO could come to visit within the next months. So they are far from signing. Whereas the German manager expects them to sign within a week.

- Yeah I think they are on the same page, but it's just that the signature comes at different stages. So, like for a German, it has to be the first thing in order to secure the relationship, whereas for the Chinese the relationship comes first, and then... Even though everyone knows that they are going to sign, but the official signing is actually not as important. Because it's about the relationship first.
- Me: Does everyone agree that the, or what do you think. (*laughter*) No, no, no just picking up what you are saying that the Chinese were quite direct, do you think that they are direct in that communication scenario?
- They are not as direct as the Germans. That's what I think. They are more polite.
- Me: Do you think they are rather direct or rather indirect? The Chinese.
- Well they try to be polite.
- They are polite yeah.
- They are direct.
- They are direct yeah, but polite.
- Whereas the Germans are a bit bossy. And a bit authoritative as well.
- But as I've said for the Germans it's polite to keep relationships out of business. So it's just about business, we are not here to make friends necessarily. It's about money. So it's the German way of being polite. By being direct. Isn't there such a saying like who said that in German if your polite than you're being honest and
- Me: yeah I know what you mean.
- Like in other cultures you tell maybe small lies in order to be polite. Whereas in the German culture you wouldn't do that. So by saying we need that signed now, it's actually the German way of being polite by not fluffing around and wasting anyone's time.
- Instead concentrating on the business.
- But I still think that the tone of the Germans is well spoken and sounds like well spoken managers but the tone is, even if he would talk to other Germans, the tone would be not appropriate. I think.
- Yeah that's true.
- Because I think he is dictating the plan. He says this is what should happen. This is what should happen... It's just a little bit too arrogant. If he would be in a situation where he is extremely powerful and he knows it's a fantastic deal for the other company and he really wants to choose to talk in this way, ok he gets away with it. But I don't think there is very many scenarios where he would get away with it. Not even in Germany, talking like that. On a table.
- Hmm ya. Ya.
- Because he's not opening anything up, he's just trying to close.
- Me: Do you think his open and direct approach makes him rather more or rather less trustworthy?
- Probably within his culture probably yes, but in another culture probably not. I would guess if he writes like that or talks like that with another German CEO they maybe will come together really quickly.
- What do you mean with trustful? For whom?
- Me: To the Chinese. Do you think yeah...
- Honestly, I wouldn't have problems with the way he puts it in Germany. Because if he says you should have had enough time, in a business

negotiation, I would say no, we haven't had, because we still have questions regarding this and this. And then you get into a discussion about the points. In a German environment I don't think that's, it's not inappropriate. I would say it's really appropriate in a German environment. But with the Chinese it seems like he's trying really to be bossy and pushy.

- Maybe I've been in New Zealand too long. Ha-ha (*male participant*). All he would have to say is instead of 'you should' I would probably expect him to say 'we hope that you had enough time'.
- Yeah but if he would be bossy he would say 'you had enough time' to look at the contracts.

33:14 min

- I would not write it in that way.
- Well, actually I have to say again. I have read German letters like that and even worse! And that's the everyday way manager talk to each other in German company environment. That's the way they talk to each other, and even worse.
- It's true but I think that's in relation to ...
- So I think that kind of letter that would be successful in a German environment, they would come to a quick result. But not in a different culture.
- But not in the beginning of a relationship, or?
- But it's not the beginning, it's ... after some months.
- Yeah he said that he had time but that's just the beginning of the...
- Me: well it's not the first meeting. They had several meetings before.
- No not the first meeting but they don't have any business together now. They don't have business together now, they want to start it. And I think now it's too arrogant.
- Me: Ok, that's cool.

34:28 min

- I think they place different importance on different values. The German is really goal *elected/addicted* (*poorly audible*) like let's finish the business quick and then we can start ..., because we have to work together we can build a relationship anyway. Whereas the relationship aspect is really, really important for the Chinese. Before we do business we have to have a good relationship and then we can manage.
- But I think for that wording, saying you know "you should have had enough time" it's just a way to get a response. Like, it's normal, it's a polite way of saying it, it's just a way to get a response. If someone is fluffing around then you know, you just try to be a bit more direct to get a response. It's not necessary to say to be pushy but just to get a response by inferring, I infer because you had a month time, I infer you had enough time to check it otherwise you would have asked us questions if you had any. So I infer that you had enough time. So I guess that we then should close the deal by next week. Because apparently no one has questions, so I'm inferring that we are all on the same page.
- But it shows the expectations of the German manager that the Chinese would communicate in the same way because as a Germans you would say no we haven't had enough time or I would have called you before and told you that we still have questions about these and these points. But he is there and he's of the opinion that everything is clear, so let's sign. Whereas the Chinese are on a

completely different page because they think ok, let's have the CEO here for a chat and let's see how the relationship develops and then we will sign.

- Yeah but I mean, I guess we have all had experience with other cultures that at some stage it can be very frustrating for Germans that if you put something out there for someone to give you a response and you don't get any response, then in the end you just have to say, well, I guess you have had enough time because I assume that by you not replying to me you are fine with it, or you don't want to do it, but just give me some kind of response. So, I guess that's the kind of idea that after you haven't heard any questions or any concerns after a month, and you know that you are going to have a business relationship it's like you ooh, I guess we can close the deal now.
- But it's like you said, you are doing business by your own standards and not taking into account that in other cultures maybe they work differently. So it's really assuming everyone thinks like a German.
- Yeah but I mean you have your cultural blueprint, like the way you think of what is polite and what is not polite. So even if you are trying to adapt to different style of communication, at some stage ... If you don't understand what's going on, you need an answer.
- It would be interesting in this case what happened in this discussion of the negotiations before, before they met. So that's a bit difficult.
- Yeah
- Me: Yeah, it's always a bit difficult but I didn't want to make the scenarios too broad because you can't put all the context in there.
- But it's really interesting if you look at the Chinese response. He doesn't say we didn't have enough time or it doesn't work like that, or.. It says, 'Business in China is done differently'. He doesn't say we do business differently, so I would think it's general. It's emphasizing the positive side.

37:51 min

- But you can't really blame him, because if he says oh sorry, we do business differently, sorry like you know, it's in your face.
- But still, "business in China is done differently, we really appreciate, and we would like" ... you don't really have something to say, you can't really find the point to say ok that's really their problem that's the reason, it's rather friendly and nice and you don't really know what the point is. Like where are the problems?
- But you just started business in China, you don't know what's going on, sorry.
- Yeah that sounds quite polite.
- I think that's quite direct to say it. You know by saying you don't know what you're doing.
- But I think that's what the German guy would say.
- Actually they are all on the same page.
- Maybe it's their way to be polite and they expect the Germans to read between the lines. And that's not the German way. We don't see each other and then ask, 'How are you, Hi, How are you'. That's not the way we are polite.
- Yeah that's true because you say 'how are you', and you don't really want an answer.

Laughter.

- The German opens up with that one sentence here, he says we need to negotiate an equally fair management structure and clarity equity issues. So it

sounds to me a little bit like yes, in the negotiations before they did listen to some of the needs of the Chinese company. And he puts that into one sentence before he obviously the one thing why he is there, is to meet, to actually negotiate those issues that are still not resolved. In a way he's fair enough. The only thing that he doesn't understand, like we all agreed, that for the Chinese that's not really the point. Because they think they can do all of this really quick, but what actually will take time is the relationship. And no business without relationship.

- But I think with him saying we need to negotiate an equally fair management things like that, the German is actually saying that they understand that they are going to need time to establish the relationship. It's just that for the Germans, they just want to close the deal before so that they have something in their hands.
- Yeah, exactly. Just the way of dealing with those ...
- First deal then relationship.
- Exactly.
- That's the way it is.
- And I remember one of our Chinese classmates telling us that whereas the approach in Germany is time is money and let's do it quick, it's quite the opposite in China. If it's important it has to take time, it needs time. I has to take a certain amount of time.
- Me: So you as Germans, would you consider the Chinese as rather more or less trustworthy because of their more reserved communication style? Does it influence your perception of ...
- From a German perspective I would say they are less trustworthy because you never know.
- Yeah
- You could spend a month time and invest everything and in the end there is no deal.
- Everything the Chinese manager says, he could have said it before. The guy is there to sign to contract man, and he says yeah... but "business in China is done differently". Why didn't you say it before? He comes now. The German manager is ready to sign the contract and finish the deal.
- And you expect a reply about the contract but didn't get an answer. That's one information you want to get but he didn't get it.
- And I would expect for example if the Germans say you had enough time and sent all the documents and said ok, I'm coming down for business in one month or whatever, and then we can sign the contract or whatever, so if you have anything please tell us before. I would assume that business is done like that. The Chinese didn't say anything, and as mentioned earlier, as the Germans didn't get any feedback, they assumed that everything is fine. And then they come down to sign the contract and it's kind of yeah...
- It's like a big step backwards.
- Yeah.
- So yeah, I would definitely say they are less trustworthy. Because for me it seems they can change their mind every time.

42:40 min

- But obviously they sent them a proposal; they didn't send them the contract to sign. So, I would assume, to the prior discussions and negotiations, they were

all on the page. Because it was about discussing. For the Germans it was after we had the discussions we are going to confirm, sign the contract. Whereas for the Chinese, ok after we had the discussions, we are going to have a relationship. And the contract is somewhere beyond. So it just, they were probably on the same page for the discussions and negotiations and then we have proposal. And I propose that to you that we could do this but for the Germans it's like, well we will do this.

- And it seems like because the Chinese manager says, if the CEO comes visit us in a few month, it seems like nothing will happen till then. So in my eyes they are not trustworthy to do business with them. Because if they do business like that you will always have problems with deadlines and all this stuff. I would assume if it takes them so long to sign a contract and they need so much to sign it, it will be the same after they signed the contract. It won't improve. So really the German attitude, time is money won't happen there.
- But obviously, for the Chinese it's like, well Mr. Schmidt is going to come and spend time with us and we're going to show him the country and how business is done and dadada.. So for them it's like, well, we have been very trustworthy. But obviously for the Germans it's like hmm, maybe no..
- Me: So do you think the Chinese are open and honest with you? Or with the Germans in this scenario?
- No
- No
- No
- Me: How come? What exactly? Why would you say that?
- They should have communicated problems or disagreements or whatever, earlier. At an earlier stage. Because, again, from the German point of view, signing the contract is the final stage.
- Me: So it comes back to the timeline?
- Ya. I would expect feedback during that time. If I don't get anything back and the German manager comes to sign the contract, or have the contract signed, and nothing happens. They should have really given feedback on time.
- And they are actually not clear with anything. They are just really open. The Germans have lots of point, like we want to do it dadada... and they just say oh, we see what happens in a couple of month.
- And the German guy said to negotiate the final details and it seems like he tries to negotiate the small points. Whereas the Chinese manager is very general. "Business isn't done like that in China". That's a really general approach to the whole business.
- Yeah but from German point of view, you have got this signature and then relationship growing that way. So for the Chinese it's form a broad perspective. It's just an opposite triangle.

Participant showing to opposite triangles.

- Wasn't that pretty?

Laughter

46:00 min

- I think the Chinese separate this as well. It's creative discussable, all the deals and all the detail s and so on. But they don't connect this to the other part, which is the relationship. So it's a little bit like you are sorting out a recipe to cook at night but you don't have the oven yet. So everything is clear, but you

actually can't do it because you haven't put the oven in place. So you talk about all the detail, what you are going to buy, how you are going to do it, how much salt, but you actually forgot that you don't have any facilities to cook with. So it's a little bit like two different levels. The Chinese are quite happy to talk about all those details, that's great, they are probably really appreciate all the German efficiency and all that. But at this moment their point is actually to get to know each other personally.

- Yeah , they want to keep everything open until they know everyone, and that's the problem.
- But I would be really concerned if someone has quite the opposite business attitude.
- Yeah
- I would think, again from German point of view, it's quite difficult to do business or a joint venture with someone who has really the opposite attitude, and thinks in completely different ways.
- Me: So from your point of view, would the communication style of the Chinese influence whether or not you would trust them?

47:41 min

- Definitely.
- I would probably employ some kind of translator who translates culture and things. Who can say well that's the way they do things and they might be trustworthy. Because that's the way they do it.
- Me: So if you don't have a translator, what would you think? Would you think they are trustworthy?
- I actually don't know.
- I guess, well obviously they are all speaking English, many people just assume that if you speak a certain language, you understand. In that context no one is going to say oh maybe we should have a Chinese who can explain us the culture. Because business people are quite arrogant and especially if it's like a huge company.
- Yeah I think being Mr. Meier, I wouldn't trust them. Everything is still open and ...
- And you don't get answers of questions you had earlier. I think that's one of the important things for me. Questions and things you talked about it, but they don't refer to that. And if I write a letter with things and questions, I want to have answers to all those questions. Even if they say we don't know now. That's ok, but they didn't refer to this.
- Me: Ok, would you be willing though to start a business relationship with the Chinese, with these Chinese in this situation?
- I think you have to, because China is a huge market and you don't really have a choice.
- Do you mean if you would have alternatives?
- Me: If you could decide whether or not you would want to start a business relationship with these Chinese in this scenario.
- Well they have to put things in place that makes a relationship. Like having a communication translator who tells you that's the way they do business in China. And that's the way you sort of have to engage with them.
- Me: So would their communication style, their way of communicating influence your decision of whether or not to start a relationship?

- Probably.
- Mine definitely.
- Yeah.
- There's too much money involved. I don't think that stuff like that is going to influence a CEO. It's just like it's going to be difficult. ... *(inaudible)* But I don't think that communication will ever stop international business relations. Even though they could probably run a lot smoother if they would employ specialized people to deal with things like that. Especially from a German point of view, where time is money, it's like we will screw all of the cultural things.
- I think they already have problems without even having started the business yet and I wouldn't trust the Chinese to speak open about problems which could come up during the business relationship. When they already showed that they are reluctant to say anything or give feedback before the business has even started yet. So if I would have an alternative, I wouldn't do business with them. Because it's a money thing, it's separately. If I would have an alternative of production in Hungary for example, for the same price, I would rather do it there. That's at least a European, Western country. Western-Eastern. But you would think the business attitudes are similar or more similar than with the Chinese.
- Me: hmm, interesting.
- Because even if I have someone to translate, it doesn't mean that I would be happy with the way they do business. Ha-ha.
- He's just asking for some more time.
- If you want to expand and want to sell your products in China, you probably have to go for it and find a way how to do it.
- Do we know that they are going to sell their product in China? The way I understood it they are going to produce them their and sell them everywhere.
- "We understand your interest in selling you product in China."
- They have to find a way to ...
- Exactly and they already had prior discussions and negotiations and a lot of time. So they are not going to stop it now. The Germans will not stop it now! This is going to go through!

Laughter.

- I don't think so. If they are going to invest a lot of money and they already have such big problems, and they can't get to an agreement, they won't do it. Because it's too much money. If they already have problems now, it's going to be an ongoing thing.

53:16 min

- I think the next step/then instead is what to do (*first half partly inaudible*) is what do you want us to do, just say it and we do it.
- And then the Chinese guy says yeah because it's done differently...
- Yeah that's the thing. The Chinese won't say... dadada bullet point list. I don't think that, seriously, a German company that has invested already so much time and money into something, they are not going to say well, talk to your competitors then. Because this is going to be the same. So, you might as well stick with them. Especially after you already had this confusion.
- I think it's more a communication problem than a business problem. And I think the German guys know that.

- They look slightly confused. Yeah
- But I think they will.
- No they won't.
- I think with communications, especially with cultural things, even if you know, at least in my experience with different cultures, even if I know what to expect from a diff country because I know there is a major difference or something, I'm still surprised occasionally. Or I'm still surprised if I say something and I'm trying to be really polite, really honest, really open and the response that you get is like wow, maybe that didn't come across right. So I think even if you're really aware of things...
- But if they analyze the situation they will see that there are not the problems in the business part, it's just a problem in the communication part.
- You don't know. Maybe they don't only communicate differently, they work differently as well.
- But it doesn't look like it. Because say said it's the final details.
- It's the final details for the German guy, but if you look at the Chinese response, it seems not that they are in the final detail stage.

55:07 min

- I think for them it's quite sweet to talk about the final details later but at this point they just want to know who they deal with. And they can't help themselves. No matter what, they can't change that.
- It's a question of trust for them as well.
- Yeah.
- They want to know if they can trust the Germans. At a different level they want to find out about the ...
- It seems like the Chinese think more in hierarchy levels. Because they are emphasizing they want to have the CEO there. Like manager Meier can't give them the answers they need or isn't enough to negotiate with them. They want the CEO there.
- Because there's some more than money to it.
- I think it's their sign for trust. It's not trustful for them that the CEO isn't there.
- They don't have a problem with making money but they want to make sure that the people they deal with and they make money with are people that are worth doing business with. It's not only about the money, no matter how, or who that person is. But for them it's the deepest belief and important that the intentions and things like that are in the right place. And it's so in their culture that they can't help themselves. I think a lot of Chinese companies actually now employ Europeans for these kind of things or they send Chinese students overseas for a long time so that they get around. Because very often or sometimes you have to do the business very quick or the plan is not going to work. So the Chinese are aware of that problem. But if you deal with them directly, like in this case, they can't say no, that's sweet and you're probably right and we will see later about the relationship. They just can't help themselves.
- Yep.

57:05 min

- As we, as the Germans can't help themselves, to think in this, how frustrating it is, everything is in place, every little detail, the money is going to role,

everything is done. And they are just not saying yes. So that's super frustrating for them they can't help themselves as well. They just get frustrated rather than saying well we've done a mistake, we didn't put that human slash cultural element into the plan and now we have a problem.

- And I think it's going to be an ongoing problem, because as soon as they signed the contract they will have a mixed management there and I think the German guys will still be annoyed and disperse with the Chinese business attitude.
- But that's always the price you pay.
- Yeah and I think you have to figure that out if you want to do business somewhere else, outside of your country.

58 min

- Me: Yeah, but what would your German assessment of trust or trustworthiness be based on? In a business deal like this?
- I think it would be trustful if every part would say ok let's sit together and talk about it. Let's think about how we can come together and whether we can come together. Like an open communication from both sides.
- Yeah, open.
- Ya.
- Ya it would be openness.
- Ya I think one of them would just need to ask ok, what are your expectations? And we say what are our expectations... But that's what was already mentioned, they need some kind of mediator. And I think both sides are at a point where they have to understand they need it now. Otherwise it won't work.
- I would say from German perspective, I would compare what is said with the results. I would be interested in the outcome. If we negotiate that, but again it's a German thing, they negotiated already everything, what is the outcome, the expectations of the German manager in this case is outcome = signed contract. And then we can start business. So if there are delays all the time I would say they are not, in my eyes they are not trustworthy.
- It's just really a matter of this manager to do the research properly before. I would for example say if the manager would stand up now on the table and sing a song, things would change. Completely. Because he's giving something prize of his own personality. There's a little story that goes along with that because that exactly just happened when people tried to sell a shipload of fish in Shanghai. It was ... fisheries from the South island and they were sitting in Shanghai around the table and they were very very hard business people, the people from Shanghai. They just wanted to get the best possible prize. And one of the Maori elderlies just got enough of it after two hours, because fish meant much more to him than just the prize. So he stood up on the table and sang an old Maori song. Things completely changed. They went out to lunch and the Shanghai guys told them that they are going to take the whole load and they just to name them the prize! It did not matter anymore! It was just that moment of the guy standing up and showing something of themselves and their culture, that's all they wanted. And they were happy. And that's how different it is, to our understanding of .. So if he would have done a little bit of reading, of the culture, some case studies. If he is so keen on the deal, maybe

he can come up with something. He can show something of himself. It probably doesn't need that much. That's his problem.

1:00:57 min

- But I guess that is, if you are like a high level executive, manager, whatever, I don't think that it occurs to the German that it's actually that important. Because they had prior discussions and negotiations so they probably allowed more time than they would have done for business in Europe. So it's like well, we already have given you more than we were willing to give you so just meet us half way. I don't think that for a purely individualistic country vs. a collective country ... Even if you think you understand, I don't think that you can power these things. Something like singing a song would be ridiculous to any Westerner because it's like something completely unprofessional. In an individualistic country you are being professional by not sharing that your wife just bought a new dog or whatsoever.

01:02:07 min

- But that's exactly the point. That's what they want to hear and then they are happy.
- Me: Ok, good. We have to be aware of the time a little bit, so we have to move on. But thanks for the discussion, that was very nice. To finish this scenario, I have a little scale from 1 – 7 and the question is: How trustworthy would you consider the Chinese to be? Like, how trustworthy would you think they are? With one being completely untrustworthy and seven being completely trustworthy.
- From our personal perspective?
- Me: Ya, from your personal perspective. In this scenario.
- 2.
- Well I go high because I know what the problem is.
- Yeah, that's the problem.
- Yeah that's the thing. Do you want us to, because we all have some kind of cultural understanding already. Or if we would be still in Germany and haven't had any contact with other cultures?
- Me: Well, no that's quite ... since this is an international company they probably will have had contact with other cultures.
- Well, if I were Mr. Meier, I would probably rate them 6 or so.
- Me: ok, but you are not Mr. Meier. You as a German, if you were in a situation like that and you would deal with Chinese and the Chinese would give you this answer. What would you think?
- But I wouldn't communicate in that way.
- It's hard. I actually... The last semester I had a few understanding problems with the Chinese in my class, and after a while I realized how they talk like they talk. And why they wrote sentences like they wrote. For me personally, it was far way out the way I would write. But now I'm getting their points. I would give them a 6.
- Yeah I would give them a 6, as well. They are the ones that are saying, you know I would like to get to know you, a bit more. Or to reply.
- Me: yeah that's alright. I don't want you to say anything specific, I just want ... ok cool.
- The frustration would be very high. It's not good, what's the deal?
- In that case I would upgrade to 3. But not more.

- Me: Upgrade?
- Upgrade?

Laughter.

- Because I still wouldn't trust to get critical feedback on time. Or to get critical feedback at all. Which is important. And again, it depends what kind of relationship it is. Is it, are we doing a teamwork together? Are we doing business together? Or are we hanging out and having a BBQ? Then I can say I'm more tolerant, in my eyes, or from my understanding. Because it's not important but if it's about something important I wouldn't rely on getting the vital information.
- For me it would, like the way the Chinese manager is talking, by just pointing out, there are differences, we are making you aware of them, dadada. So I would say 7 that they are trustworthy. Because they are willing to... (...) from their usual point of communication. And if the Germans just manage to take that on than there should be no problem.
- Me: Hmm, ok, well it's a similar question, but to what extent would you think the Chinese are honest with you?
- What would they say for being dishonest?
- Yeah they are honest.
- I would say they are probably being honest, but they are not saying anything.
- But if (*inaudible*) appreciate the effort, you never know.
- Ok, from the German point of view, it could sound quite sarcastic, in saying 'we really appreciate this BUT'...
- I would say neutral because they can't assess it if they are lying or not. If they are honest or not.
- Yeah they might just, ...
- But I mean doesn't that come a little bit together, the trustworthiness and the honest?
- Me: Yeah that's what I meant, that they might be kind of close.
- Yeah. I actually wonder how you separate them.
- No, I would say it's different because the one thing is, do I trust this person as a business person, to achieve certain goals in the negotiated time. I would say no, because they are already delaying. Although I've expected them just to sign. Do they lie to me, I don't know. Because lying would be if they say yeah we are going to finish in that time and then they don't.

1:07:33 min

- But I mean from seeing like the way Chinese economy is going, you know it's such a huge market, so there's going to be a success. Or there's going to be the market for it and there will be no issue with that. You know that Chinese can copy anything and make anything, and they are really good at that. And they have really good education and what not. So, ...
- But at the same time they could be in negotiation with your competitors. So they might just look for the best deal and keep you in the loop.
- Me: Ok, so maybe we can just cut the honest question out. Can I please ask you the same question, but from, would you trust the Germans? Like how trustworthy would you consider the Germans to be? In this scenario?
- Well, being Germans, 7.
- Ya
- Ya

- Ya
- Me: Alright, that's a good answer. Cool, ok, last question for this scenario: Ok, we talked a lot about the Chinese, and now it's a about the Germans communication style. Do you think they are completely open and honest with Chinese? Or do you think they might have something in their back and try to screw them over?
- I would assume that they are completely honest and open in their German framework.
- Yeah I think they have put everything forward that they can put forward. Yeah.
- I would say that, or think that, because they haven't had any feedback or anything so they are trying to show them that they are being open and honest and everything. So maybe they had something they were planning to do, but to me it sounds more like they decided to cut that...
- I think as long as things go well, financially, they will all be sweet. But as soon as there is financial troubles, as the Chinese I would think that the Germans would be right, and in first crisis, they would pull out. Maybe that's one of the reasons the Chinese want to have those relationships. To manage those crisis together, but who knows. Something like that.
- Me: yeah that's cool.
- I would say the Germans are stating clearly what they want and what they expect. So, I would say equals trustworthy and honest.
- Me: that's alright, that's the German perspective.
- Yeah I think they put a lot of weight on the trustworthy and honest thing, because they refer to the lawyer, and check everything and like ya.
- Me: cool.
- Do you know the movie Nemo? Dory and directions to Sydney...

Laughter.

- Me: cool, thank you very much. Can I please ask you to read the second scenario. It's the last scenario, it's a bit shorter and the questions are a bit shorter as well.

Participants read scenario 2.

- I kind of don't understand it, really.
- Me: I had that in the pilot as well, and I changed it to make it easier, but ... Ok, what exactly?
- For me it sounds rather like, well to me it would make perfect sense if it wasn't a German but an American. That would make perfect sense. But for a German..
- Yeah but would be the Chinese not contact the German again. But in this case I would expect the German to contact the Chinese when I've got approval that everything is ok, or don't, but that's what a German would do. Even if not, he would give feedback.
- Me: What exactly do you not understand about it?
- The German guy says I will contact, I will have to talk to administration or whatever, to see if they approve, and then it says Dr. Mueller and Dr. Xi don't hear from each other again. But I would expect the German guy to give feedback. To tell Dr. Xi they approved or they don't approved. But that doesn't happen. But that's what I would assume as the German way, even if it's a negative answer or reply. Whereas, for example as you said in US or NZ,

it's quite usual to say 'I call you' and then you don't hear anything. Or 'I will contact you again'.

Laughter.

- Me: Ok, we are going to talk about that in a minute. Thanks.
- Yeah I think that is probably the point in this ...
- But that's the same with like 'how are you'. It's just about relationship building, just to show oh well, I appreciate your presence now.
- Me: Ok, can we please stop here now. I have some more questions on this.

Everybody talking and laughing.

- Because I think that's one of the main problems that business relationships between America and Germany have is that usually the Americans would say 'oh you're always welcome at my house', and then the German actually goes there and then it's like who are you?
- Me: Ok, ok. I assume you all read the scenario by now? Ha-ha.
- But then the American guy hopefully won't say anything because he's too polite full to say he didn't mean it.
- Me: Ok, would you trust Dr. Mueller that he needs to check his organization?
- No (*male*).
- Ya (*female*).
- Ya (*female*).
- No?

1.14.08 min

- Why not? Germans always have to check things and double check things and make sure that everything is alright.
- I wouldn't start with "I'm interested but I have to check ..." And then wrote he ... Well, you can read that he's not interested.
- Yeah that's what I would say. He's not interested at all.
- No he isn't.
- He says he doesn't want to teach. That's what he basically says! He just (*inaudible*) that he doesn't have to teach. It's quite clearly for me he's saying hey look, sorry I don't want to ...
- I wouldn't, I wouldn't ...
- Yeah you're DR. ROLAND MUELLER and you got 3 years to do research and fancy things ...
- But that's not the point, the point is what he says. And he says oh yeah maybe I'm interested but but, but, but ... You can read the word but too often.
- I do that all the time that I say 'I really want to go BUT I have to ...'
- But you're not sure...
- If you really want to ...
- Yeah but if you say but, everything you have said before is not true.
- If it doesn't only depend on you, but on other factors, I would definitely say but.
- Yeah.
- And he explains it really in detail why but. Because it doesn't depend on his personal opinion or personal needs, it depends on his university and what the scholarship or whatever he got there includes.
- And I find that suspicious because if he knew exactly what he wanted he wouldn't have to go into detail. It's like someone that has just ... You know

you just got someone and doing something that he shouldn't do and he's explaining for hours and hours.

- Yeah he's just inviting reasons why he don't say now ...
- But that doesn't make sense for a German.
- Yeah.
- If a German is interested I would ...
- I know a Kiwi would answer like this. Most Kiwis would say I'm interested, and I might do that...

Laughter.

- Yeah.
- It's not very German.
- It's Austrian I think. I think it would be normal for an Austrian.
- Well, for me it would be normal but in saying ... I would respond like that if I'm really interested.
- Ya. If I'm really interested I would say, God, I'm so interested but the problem is, here is my scenario, you won't believe it but I just got 3 years of dadada but I have to double check but I'm really interested.
- I would never write something like that.
- Yeah and then again he's going to teach on his specific research topic which ads to his personal experience and all that stuff, and it's good to have something like that in your CV. So I would assume Dr. Mueller really wants to go but it's not up to him. It's up to his university and grant or whatever.
- Yeah I think he has to check with his employer but I think what he really didn't say that he expects an official invitation he then can put forward to his employer. That makes up for the time away.
- But he didn't ask for that.
- But that's something that's missing in here. That he didn't ask for that.
- Me: May I ask who thinks that he's just telling the truth, that he's really interested but he has to check. And who thinks that he's actually not interested and that's just a polite way of saying ah na, sorry.
- He's not interested (*male*).
- Very clearly not interested! (*male*)
- He's interested (*female*).
- Yeah (*female*).
- Maybe that's a male-female thing.
- That's quite funny.
- Me: Do you think this response from Dr. Mueller is a direct or an indirect statement?
- Indirect (*male*).
- Direct (*female*).
- Depends on your interpretation of it.
- I think it's typical German and he just wants to make everything sure.
- Exactly. It's so German to give every single detail. Because, I'm interested but I can't tell you just because...
- And I'm following the rules.
- Exactly.
- First I go to my department, then ...
- He's just giving an explanation why he can't say yes straight away.

- Yeah.
- Yeah, because he doesn't want to get the hopes of Dr. Xi up with saying yeah I'm interested I'm sure I can do it. So he explains his interest but there are certain factors that play a role. Again, the only thing that doesn't fit is that Dr. Mueller doesn't contact Dr. Xi.
- Yeah.
- Yeah that's right. (*agreement of all female participants*)
- Because he says I'll check with the administrators to get their approval. I get their approval and then ...
- Yeah because even if he doesn't get the approval, it wouldn't be his own fault. He could say I'm sorry the department doesn't approve or whatever.
- Yeah that's true (*male*). If there is an answer he would definitely reply. I agree with that.
- And I wouldn't expect Dr. Xi to contact him.
- Yeah that's true. (*male*)
- Because I'm the one who has to check so ...
- Yeah it's my part, so my task.
- Yeah it's my task and I'm going to contact you as soon as I know.
- Me: Ok, taking the lengths of the elaborate answer into account, do you think this makes it rather more or less direct or indirect?
- The length more direct.
- Does the length play a role?
- It can't be more direct I think.
- Yeah.
- Yeah it makes it more direct, because he gives the explanation. And that's the German way. You have a certain way of doing things and that's the way you do it, and he explains exactly what steps he has to take to get an appropriate answer for Dr. Xi.

01:20:16 min

- And such an answer suggests that they had prior contacts and that they know each other. I mean obviously the Chinese knows about all of the research that Dr. Mueller has done and all these things. So you wouldn't just randomly invite random people to ...
- Me: yep. No it says they ...
- It says he was on a study tour, it doesn't say they worked together but I would assume from the answer that they had prior contact and that they have a relationship. Which again emphasizes for me that he is really interested.
- I think they probably just know each other on the surface. He was on a study tour and they just met? I think. When they were on the study tour? And they know they are in the same study area and he seems interested.
- Me: Well I just assume they knew each other. They weren't best friends or whatever but they know each other.
- But if... he didn't answer anymore, I think Mueller, he is waiting for an answer from Xi. Like, ok I will wait. This is what he misses. Because he wrote him a long answer and he expects kind of an ok.
- But we don't know that.
- Yeah because they don't hear from each other anymore.

- But we don't know how Dr. Xi invited him. If it was a conversation, like this one and Dr. Mueller says I'm going to clear this with my department or whatever.
- Ah yeah.
- If it's an email we would expect Dr. Xi to respond. And say ok, I'm waiting for your reply. But it doesn't say anything about this.
- Me: Do you think the lengths of the answer or the long explanation of what's going on or whatever it might be, does that influence whether or not you would classify him as trustworthy? Or if you would perceive him as being trustworthy?
- I personally would think he is, like you said, he is talking so much around and so much 'but's' and so completely unenthusiastic about the idea, doesn't mention about maybe meeting, in talking about it. He's just, basically I would say it's just blah blah.
- Me: ok.
- And he's not really interested. That's how I would read it. But that's also after being 10 years in New Zealand. And getting a lot of Yes's that are No's.
- Yeah exactly. But you wouldn't expect that from a German.
- Yeah, I just have to put this in perspective obviously and it's a big part of my life and my perception has changed.
- Yeah from that perspective I would say it differently. From a German perspective, I would say he's totally honest with me. And that's the way he wants to go and ...
- But there's still not much enthusiasm in it. When I got invited to New Zealand, I was like wow, fantastic. I'll make it work.
- Yeah but he makes it clear, I'm personally interested but there are other factors which influence my decision, so I would say he's interested.
- But his interest is only shown in two words. And that's for this long answer too less.
- Plus if you really are on power or if you have the ability to do research for 3 years, it's definitely going to be self directed studying. And if you really want to go to China and if you really would be interested then you can incorporate this into your research proposal and make a way to get there. And that's what he would talk about if he really wanted to, He wouldn't talk about how it's more unlikely or maybe not likely or what would have to do to make that happen.
- Depends on the character.
- Yes.
- Who knows how much work it was to get this grant and maybe there are really some special conditions on ...

01:24:46 min

- I mean he's saying I'll check with administrators to get their approval. He's not saying I'll check if I can do it. He says I'll check so I'll get the approval. I want the approval.
- Yeah. I think that is more honest than saying yes I would really like to do it but not being sure if it's possible for him. And then disappointing Dr. Xi by saying I'm sorry the department didn't approve because then I would say that's not honest. It's only, he just made it up ..

- Yeah maybe he argued for ages ‘no I don’t want to teach , I don’t want to teach...’ and all of a sudden he comes and says I’ll be gone for two month I would like to go to China for teaching. And maybe that’s the problem. Maybe there’s something in his mind, I don’t know. Maybe that’s why he is careful.
- Yeah.
- And thinks about how he can argue about this.
- Maybe Dr. Xi just waits for the counter invite. The relationship thing again.
- Me: So, what exactly in this scenario or yeah what would you base your assessment of trust or trustworthiness of Dr. Mueller on in this scenario?

01:25:40 min

- He’s very trustworthy.
- Yeah
- Me: well, is there anything in particular that you would say that’s the reason why you think he’s honest?
- Because he gives such ...
- Me: Because of the explanation?
- Yeah. Because of the detail and the explanation.
- Me: or don’t trust him, sorry.
- And he doesn’t contradict himself in his explanations.
- But I mean you think the opposite, so ... it’s the same explanation but the opposite..
- Me: Yeah, I mean it’s really good that you think something else.
- Yeah I mean I wouldn’t think he’s not trustworthy, I just think he has a very friendly way of saying that he’s not interested. (*male*)
- Me: Ok.
- Yeah. (*male*)
- Yeah I think it depends. Because he is German I really would trust him. If he would be an American, or Kiwi, I wouldn’t trust his answers.
- Na you wouldn’t believe him.
- And it’s too detailed to say he isn’t interested and just made it up. Because he’s really giving the facts.
- Hmm yeah.
- And it’s too much facts for that.
- Yeah for a German it would be too many facts. Like, you wouldn’t make up..
- Would be too much work... Ha-ha.
- Me: yeah that’s quite funny, I had that answer before.
- Because if he would make it up he would say I’m interested but I’m sorry I have to check with my department and I will contact you again.
- Yeah fair enough.
- Ok I mean if you say that that would be ok but if you say oh, look, I got a three years grant which obviously Dr. Xi could check if he wanted to if that’s true and there’s special conditions, he could check all of that. It’s not that he just pulling facts from thin air. So if he would just say oh, I’ll just have to check with my department. (*That would be counting; poorly audible*). But giving detail’s that can be checked ...
- Me: ok, that’s a very nice German answer. Ok, if I can ask you to look at my little scale again. To what extent do you believe that Dr. Mueller is being

honest as to his availability? Like, do you really think he has to check and that's the reason why he's giving that answer?

- He's German. So as Germans, 7.
- 7.
- Yea 7.
- Well after hearing you all talking about it I'm trying to remember how I ..
(male)
- Me: No, no I don't want to convince anyone to say any specific things...
- Yeah I'm not so convinced anymore. Now.
- 2. (male)
- I stay with my initial perception and was not trustworthy. (male)
- Me: that's cool.
- It has changed now, but after hearing that I'm wondering how I probably would have answered to it 10 yrs ago. I probably would have also been quite detailed. But now I know you just don't do that (male).

Laughter.

- You would say oh great ...
- Me: ok just say what you would say in your point of view.
- My first reaction to it was no, it doesn't ... (male)
- Me: So 1, 2,3, ish?
- Yeah 2, also. (male)
- The detail is good but as you said the enthusiasm is missing. That's the important thing. (male)
- Yeah. (male)
- But then they are scholars. You are not so enthusiastic.
- Yeah, a German really isn't a kind of outgoing personality. We are more like ...
- No, but now if you get this opportunity to, na that's such a big opportunity .
- I think he is very polite to keep it down, and not like OH MY GOD...
- He jumps up when he gets his approval but not before.
- Exactly, more quietly.
- But just to write only 'I'm interested' I think that's not enough. That's the problem. For me. (male)
- I think he's real just careful because he's got other ...
- And maybe he's very disappointed, because he's actually SO interested but he has got other engagements. So he can't say oh my god, I'm so interested because it's disappointing to himself that he can't take this opportunity, maybe..
- Yeah.
- And if he would show OMG, I'm so interested, that's such a big opportunity for me. But he's DR. SOMETHING.
- Yeah exactly, so get out of my way. Ha-ha.
- Exactly. Thank you for contacting me....
- I get offers like that every day...

Laughter.

- I will put it to all the other offers...
- Contact me again in three years, thank you.

- Me: ok, I know although I know that it's quite similar, but there is a slight difference. But I just want to ask you would you answer the same way if I would ask you how trustworthy you would Dr. Mueller perceive to be? Or how trustworthy do you think Dr. Mueller is? Would that be the same?
- Yeah. (*male*)
- Well I would go down to 6 because on the trust part I would probably expect from him to push further. To contact Xi again.
- Yeah, that's strange.
- Why didn't he get back to him?
- Yeah.
- So just the answer. I didn't get approval or I did get approval. That part is missing and that's ...
- Yeah I think for a German that doesn't make sense. Like a person who doesn't give any feedback is not trustworthy. In a German context.
- Especially when it's a professional relationship. You would expect him to give feedback.
- Yeah.
- Yeah just to keep the relationship ongoing.
- Yeah.
- So I would say he's not trustworthy. But that's just because, he would be completely trustworthy if he would contact again.
- Me: that's cool. What do all the others think?

01:31:58 min

- I would say neutral because I would say completely trustworthy but the end doesn't fit, the whole scenario. So I don't know really what to think about it.
- Yeah that's really weird.
- Ya.
- Ya I mean for a German it just doesn't make sense to not contact, especially in.. I wouldn't trust a person, a German, who doesn't do this. I'm completely fine with trusting a Kiwi who would say that. If they would contact you it would be like OMG, are you sure? Ha-ha. But for a German it doesn't make sense.
- Me: ok. Cool. Ok we're almost done. Ok, these were basically the questions for the last scenario and now I'd just like to ask you for some recommendations, because you obviously saw that there is some miscommunication going on in these scenarios and, well the answer is probably quite obvious, I'd just to ask you what would Mr. Mueller have to do differently so you would consider him as more trustworthy?
- Respond.
- Me: anything else maybe?
- More enthusiastic.
- Maybe he could ask for more details about the project? The two month project.
- Me: The Chinese?
- No, Dr. Mueller. Could ask him a little bit more about the details
- Me: oh from the Chinese. Ok ok.
- But I mean, it sounds that the Chinese has given him...

- But is says using data sets available in China, so it on his research topic, but I agree with you, I would have asked about the data sets. To know what is available in China. Unless he already has this information.
- But then again, it's the same than in the other scenario that for Germans, they want to finalize it first to make sure they actually can communicate to this. And if I can communicate than I ask for the details.
- Which actually again talks for him being more general about it. If he's really interested in going that's right I would also ask about. (*male*)
- Yeah.
- I would ask for an official invitation, just to have something on paper. I think, I don't know, but I think it's just a spoken invitation. So not an actual written invitation.
- You could see it both ways. You could say Dr. Mueller wants first to make sure he be has approval and then he will ask for the details or you could say if he's really interested he would ask for the details first. But then it would be a waste of time if the department says no.
- It would be a waste of time for the Chinese as well. So you know it's like make me a list with all the details and dates and...
- Yeah.
- It makes sense approval first and then the details, yeah.
- So I would find that very rude if you ... So you don't make sure that you have got the possibility, even if it doesn't end up working out, but...
- And if it's seminars on his very specific research topic, he already has everything he needs to it. It's only the data sets, which he would have to ask for.

01:35:43 min

- Me: ok so apart from the response part, would you have any recommendations or what would you recommend to do differently so that this miscommunication part wouldn't take place?
- Recommendations to what?
- Me: Well, general on this scenario. What would you say should be different so there would be no miscommunication?
- I honestly don't understand why there is a miscommunication.
- We don't know. Yeah. The point of Dr. Xi, he could just have asked him and not meaning it. And he just thought, well he has written ...
- He didn't give me enough details so maybe he didn't mean it.
- But then again, that would make sense if Dr. Xi would be the one who would have had, would have to contact Dr. Mueller, but it's the other way around. It's Dr. Mueller's obligation to contact Dr. Xi, so that doesn't make sense. We don't know why there is a miscommunication.
- But maybe for Dr. Mueller it would have been necessary for the Chinese to say oh that's great, let me know how you get on. Or something ... Just like question, response, question, response... so one person, next person ...
- At that point you expect he didn't mean his invitation.
- Yeah.
- So maybe just because he didn't say ok I understand this is a concern for you so please let me know, I want really blah blah blah ...
- Maybe Dr. Xi thought because he's giving me so much information, he doesn't want it. It's a nice way to say No.

- Or maybe also the problem is that he actually doesn't ask a question. He's just stating what is. So first there comes an invitation, which is a question. You know, do you want to come? And then he just makes a statement about it. But he's not opening the communication up.
- Hmm yeah so from a German point of view it might mean that I'm telling you know I'm going to give you an answer tomorrow.
- But why would you ask it in first place, if you're not interested at all? Because that's more than being polite. Why would Dr. Xi ask him to give seminars on his specific research topic if he wouldn't want him there?
- It's like Kiwis ask you to come to BBQ's . Ha-ha.
- Maybe that explains why he doesn't get an answer from Dr. Xi, because he's actually not asking a question. He could have said all of that and then at the end saying, ... ask him a little, completely meaningless question. About who's the weather at this moment in China? But he didn't do that and maybe the Chinese then thought ok, maybe he's actually not asking any questions so he obviously doesn't want to ...
- Yeah he should have asked a question and Dr. Xi should have gotten back to him and say well, let me know if I can be of any help. On anything you have to deal with your ...
- This is kind of closing it at this point. Saying first he has to get approval and .. I think most of us would have probably if they want to communicate they probably would ask a lot of questions at the interest to keep the communication going.
- I think this is just the problem that he doesn't really initiate a response. But he probably expected a response just to say I got your email or your something or I received your communication and I'm looking forward to hearing from you or something like that.
- Yeah. So it becomes a commitment but not no one knows what happens..
- And I would clearly distinguish between private relationships and professional relationships. Because if you do something like that as a professional you're not only taming your own image bus also the image of you organization or institution or whatever. So, you can't behave like that in a professional way. If I'd say privately to you come to my BBQ and the I never ask you that's my own thing . But as a representative of my own organization I can't behave like that.
- Yeah but he can still ask some questions to keep the conversation going.
- But I only meant to asking stuff I don't even mean. Like you should come, but I don't even mean it.
- Yeah.
- Especially, if it would be like I would assume you need a special visa for china and dadada... And invitations and what not, so it's not going to be like an easy process anyway. So I don't think it's like the kind of random question you would ask without meaning it.
- Yeah.
- Like can I bring my wife? Ha-ha.
- Me: Ok, cool, do you have any questions? On this scenario? Or the whole focus group or something?
- Are those real scenarios?

- Me: they are transcripts. The second one is from a book actually. I just cut out two sentences and changed one because it was too confusing. But that's actually a scenario from a book. And the other one is a transcript from a video.
- Can you tell us what happened in this second scenario?
- Me: ahm, that's the scenario, the only difference is that the last sentence was different. It was that the German did not hear from the Chinese again. And I had a pilot and the participants were like well but it wouldn't be the Chinese turn to contact the German again, it would be the German's turn to contact the Chinese again. So I cut that out but it's obviously not easier now.
- But certainly Dr. Mueller doesn't behave in an appropriate German way.
- Yeah but he didn't do it before either. Because there was no communication before either.
- Why would you expect Dr. Xi to contact Dr. Mueller?
- I would think that just to ensure that he received the communication...
- But it doesn't say how the communication... I don't know if part of it isn't cut out.
- Yeah but in the original it said that Dr. Xi didn't contact Dr. Mueller anymore.
- Because you would expect this to be a two-way communication. And someone gives something and ...
- Me: So would that make a difference for you if the last sentence were ...
- It would be clearer because then you would assume that it's for example an email conversation and you expect Dr. Xi to reply.
- Because Dr. Mueller now could think that because he didn't hear back from Dr. Xi, it could mean that actually it wasn't a real invite. It was just like blah.
- But then why blah in the first place?
- Yeah that's the question!
- Me: Would you consider Dr. Mueller as trustworthy or rather trustworthy if the last sentence were that he didn't hear from Dr Xi again?
- Yeah.
- Maybe yeah.
- I would say it makes sense why he didn't contact Dr. Xi anymore. Because that would be again, make you lose face if someone just blah to you without ... And Dr. Mueller would be very excited about and say oh guess what, I got the approval and dr. Xi would be like ahhh...hmm... sorry we had some trouble with your visa...

Laughter.

- I just made it up. Ha-ha
- Me: Ah, cool. Anything else? No? Sweet. Well thank you all very much for coming.
- With your Chinese focus group you talk about the same scenarios?
- Me: Yes.
- It would be interested to see what they say.
- Or what the Kiwis say!
- Yeah.
- Me: Thank you very much for coming, thank you very much for participating, that was very nice.
- Welcome.
- Good luck!

- Me: Thanks!

Appendix F: Transcript of focus group B (China)

Focus group B (China) – audio transcription

Date: 22.11.2010, 5.30 -7 pm.

Participants: 4 participants, all male

Min = minute

Transcript:

Showing of video clip.

- Me: Ok, that's it. Ok that was the only video clip I'm going to show. So I just want to ask you, how would you describe the communications style of the manager?
- What do you mean? What kind of style? I don't know.
- Me: The style? Ya, ok. How would you describe the way he communicated to her? Or he spoke to her?
- Hmm, very kindly.
- Me: Kindly?
- Ya.
- Me: You think he was very kindly?
- Ya, because, I think that guy slowed down his words, and the speed and the words were clearly. And he was very gentle the way he got to the answer.
- Me: Ok. Does everyone else think the same?
- Hmm, actually. I didn't very clearly understand this conversation. Honestly, because in the rush I haven't been ready to concentrate.
- Me: Ok, do you want to watch it again?
- Ya, ya. Let's watch it again.

3:52-8:22 min. Rewind and playing of DVD again.

- So what's the problem with that? He asks...
- No, he just tries to find out who's responsible.
- Yeah but the original question was ...
- Me: Well, the question was ...
- Who created that ...
- Advertisement layout, right?
- Me: Yeah it's an advertisement report.
- And the thing is that he thinks it's a disaster. And then she is just like asking for 5 minutes and then get back to him then. That's just like, it's kind of normal. How you deal with a customer.
- I think that the office in the scene, the environment is Asian style...
- Yeah definitely Chinese style.
- Yeah.
- I think that this company must have been Asian culture dominant. So this guy comes to her and asks her questions and he tries to use some kind of, I'm not sure how to say this, 'local' way to talk to her.
- No, this is just normal. Just normal, just ask the same thing.
- Yeah but do you find that he ask ...

- No, he's just trying to asking who is responsible to this and then they would try to fix the problem. Not trying to blame it to someone else.
- Yeah to find the problem and ask who ... (*rest inaudible*)
- Me: Ok.
- The woman here, I think is she, she wants to go back talk to the other people how to do it and then give (*her; conversation not clear*) the answer.
- Na. Because she said she needed to talk to the team though. So, they really need to have a meeting first, before they really give an answer to the customer, or to the client. That's kind of normal though.
- Yeah that's normal.
- Can we continue?
- Me: Ha-ha, are under time pressure?
- When I talk he's asking me a question, and I say ah I have to talk to my team members before I give you an answer. Yeah it's normal.
- Me: Do you think the same?
- Yeah. I think he just wants to get the result immediately. Right?
- Me: Ya.
- But yeah she wants to talk with another member. Ya.
- I think you don't know the whole situation, this guy ..., she needs to think about it, to find the whole what's the situation.
- Because this guy here, he said that a person named like John? John what? So, this lady, she already answered that they do it together. So, she kinda like directly give an answer to the client though. So this guy John who, he's the one who's in charge. So, she have to really talk to John first and then they sit down and really talk together. Have a meeting, then she's directly give an answer.
- Me: Ok. What do you think about it?
- What is your question?
- Me: The question was actually how would you describe his communication style?
- Yeah from my perspective, I think this man is the manager, come to this lady and say ... was a bit anxious and angry, how to find what's the problem. With the advertisement. I don't think this is an important way to ... or attitude or manner to approach his employee. He gives pressure on them, and maybe unfair, because he haven't done any investigations, so he what's the reason for this problem. He just want to find someone responsible for this problem. Maybe at the end, he can't find anyone responsible for this problem. Na, I don't think this is right way to find the problem. You have to more settle.
- Me: Do you think that his behaviour was appropriate in this situation?

13:27 min

- Any organization they have a dominant culture. If he's the boss, he can do whatever he want. Right? This is the culture. If your employee doesn't happy, you can either accept or you can either leave the company. It's your choice.
- Me: So you think the way he talks to her is due to the organizational culture?
- What's the relationship between this guy and the lady? He's a client or he's the boss?
- Me: Na, na he's the manger ...
- Ah, he's the manager.

- Me: ... and she is an employee. And they created that report and he is basically her manger and talking to her.
- Complaining to her.
- He he's employer right?
- Me: yeah, he's the manager.
- Ok, he's the manager right?
- He's the manager and she is under him.
- It's kind of very normal though. Something went wrong and the manager would just talk to you in this way. It's kind of very normal. Everywhere you go it's just the same. So, it's just depending, because he's still the manager. The way he asks is still polite. He goes right to the point. He doesn't make up a long story, he goes right to the point.
- I thought this woman is the manager.
- Yeah. I thought he's the client of the advertisement company. And making a complaint.
- Me: Ah, no, no.

15:20 min

- For me, for the Asian culture, if somebody talk to you and you sit there, I think that she is the boss. You can't answer like this. For me, I need to stand up and ok ...
- If I'm manager I will call my employee come to my office.
- Maybe this is kind of like a soft approach.
- Yeah really this is the lack of manager ...
- So now you are really confused?
- Me: Ha-ha, yeah. It's good though. I've never seen it from that perspective.

15:58 min

- If I had directed this, the manager would sit down and the employee would come to complain.
- I left China too long. I left China eight years ago, so ...
- So you worked in a company? Before? Some working experience?
- Yes, I do.
- Ok, so when your boss wants talk to you asks you to see him or he comes to your office?
- Either way.
- Ok.
- Fair enough.
- But it's hard to imagine, in China there's no boss like that.
- Me: So in China there wouldn't be the situation that the manager would come to the employee and ask for something?
- Hmm, he would give him a call and say come into my office.
- Yeah.
- Me: Ah, ok.
- That's why I said I left China for too long. Ha-ha.
- My uncle, he's a big boss and when he wants to do something he gives people a call.
- Yeah the employee should respect the manager.
- Me: Ah, ok. So if you think that's kind of normal...

- I think this woman maybe is little bit of scared. So the manager comes to employee's office to complain, this is Oh My God, what did I do? Giving you lots of pressure.
- Me: So if someone would talk to you like that, if you manager would talk to you like that, would you feel insulted by this, or would that just be normal?
- Na, it's normal.
- Me: Ok.
- Yeah I would, but I don't know. Is that in China?
- It's everywhere the same though. Worldwide it's all the same.
- Na, I don't think so. Especially here, in New Zealand.
- Here (*you maybe talk like this, but in China, it's very less; conversation not clear*)
- In New Zealand boss never talks to you in this way. Never ever.
- How does he talk then?
- More nicely. Of course.
- Like a friend.
- Yeah, why not. That's why China never democracy.
- You said communication style, right? I think this is normal.
- Me: Ah ok. That is quite interesting actually.
- It's hard to tell.
- Me: Yeah it is. So, when he is talking like that, what do you think his intentions are? Do you think he just wants to find out what is going on or do you think ...?
- He just wants to blame someone. Tries to find someone to blame. I think it very depends on what kind of organization you are. If you are like a factory or this kind of organization, maybe accept it. But if you are in a more professional organization, ...
- Like Google?
- No, more professional, more polite...
- Me: Well, ok last question. *It's really funny what you answered, I didn't expect that.* Would you prefer, in a business environment, would you prefer a direct style like he used, or would you prefer if someone would be a bit more friendly and nicely?
- Depends on which company you are. If like a factory, you will need to be patient, you know, where how important it is process. If like in other type of company it's different ...
- It's not my way/view.
- Me: So as an office job.
- For me if I'm the manager of a company I just like be friendly talk to them. But here, not in China. In China, I won't do it that way. I would just give them a call, come to my office, I need to talk to you.
- Me: That's quite straightforward.
- Yeah, depends which environment you are. Depends on people's background.
- Me: Does it depend whether you are the manager and you talk to an employee or whether you are talking someone in the same hierarchy level? Would you do it the same way, to ring up another manager and say hey, come pop in my office?

21:40 min

- In a company in China, I do it the traditional way, *inaudible*. But here I need to do the shorter distance.
- Me: Hmm, ok. Thanks for that, that was quite interesting. Can I please ask you to read scenario one.
- I've already read it.
- Me: You've already read it, yeah. Have another look, to refresh your mind.
- You know, sorry this is maybe besides topic.
- Me: That's alright.
- Many, many Chinese couldn't find a job in local in NZ.
- Yeah it's hard.
- You know why?
- I don't know. Maybe communication problem?
- Yeah of course.
- You are the immigrant and less familiar with the local stuff. You need to know the local way to talk to people. I think that's the problem.
- Na, na I don't think so. From my perspective I think the more thing is really to the culture. The communication, the language, yes it is important, of course. But many people can speak like you or you, they can talk, but still they couldn't find a job because it's beyond the language.
- Yeah, like the background, the culture. Is that what you mean?
- How to say... it's understand each other. When you talk to your employer, they couldn't understand you.
- Yeah, because you are using your background culture use the other language to other culture people, so always like...
- Me: Yeah, it's communication.
- So if he can't understand you, why employing you, this is the point.
- Yeah if you are in the same culture, the people who can use your culture to track other people what do they thinking, if you are different culture, it's hard to track what do they think about.

24:20 min

- If they can't understand you... So, if he's Kiwi, you are Chinese, I'm a Kiwi boss, I talk to another Kiwi and just need two sentences to solve this problem. I talk to you maybe in twenty sentences and even I still can't solve the problem. So why I have to employ you?
- The conversation is to hard, no soft. I'm sorry that's not the point.
- Na, I'm sorry that's beyond point.
- Me: Na, that's alright. Are you alright with the scenarios?
- Yeah, yeah.
- Me: Ok, to start with, what do you think are the reasons the German managers insist on signing the contract, right now? That they are pushing so hard?
- Ok, for me...
- Me: Ha-ha, did you prepare the scenarios?
- Yeah, of course. I think there are lots of key words there. The German focus on the quickly, extremely economically and productive. So they focus on the speed and the opportunity. If you can catch the opportunity, you can go for more profit. This is a high profit opportunity or economical high profit. This is what they see.
- So you mean the Chinese ignore the ...

- No that's the way, that's the German side. All German thinking.
- Me: Na, na, don't answer from what Germans would say. Answer from what you as a Chinese think what's going on.
- Na, from the scenario. We'll be objective.
- Me: Exactly. So, would you consider this as 'normal' behaviour? Like in China, would that happen in China like that?
- Of course.
- Me: Ya?
- So, should we talk about German side or both sides?
- Me: No, no, you just talk about your cultural point of view.
- The Chinese manager ... inaudible
- Yeah the Chinese manager they want to know each other better than go further to sign the final agreement. This is no surprise I think. I think it's normal.
- Me: Ok.
- So what was the question?
- Me: The question was what do you think are the reasons the German managers insist on signing the contract, right now? Why do you think are they pushing so hard?
- So the German side? For me just they want the market opportunity for economic high profit.
- I think the German managers, they are more focused on the procedure. Step by step. And the Chinese managers they are focused on the relationship.
- Yeah, relationship.
- If you have a relationship, it's better for your joint venture. But this scenario is man made. It's ...
- Me: Yeah, it's actually a transcript from a video but the video itself is a bit artificial, so it's not a video from a real negotiation scene. These were actors. But it's slightly authentic.
- So how about question two?
- Me: Ha-ha, I can't believe you prepared the answers.
- Yeah because classes have finished and I had nothing to do.
- Me: That's really cool. Ok, so how would you describe the German communication style? Or how would you describe the way they communicate? The language they use.
- People in Germany they are more restrict and follow the procedure.
- More to gain profit, (*like eager to do something; conversation not clear*).
- Me: Do you think, although these are Germans, *do you think there would be a communication*, or do you think that Chinese would say something in that way? Or would start negotiations in that way?
- In a formal way we negotiate business, in a formal way, like in the German example. But after the formal we use other way to try to get to know each other.
- It's hard to say no. The majority of business in same way. I'm quite disagree. It all depends on the situation.
- Yeah, after one week, (*to give you what we thinking; conversation not clear*).
- I think from a Chinese way, if you want to cooperate with a Western company, you should know this company firstly. It depends. You say you have money

and equipment, right, but we should know you, your background, something like that.

- So the Chinese focus on the relationship. Like in Chinese we call it Guanxi.
- Relationship, yeah.

30:40 min

- Yeah, Guanxi. It's hard to translate in English. This relationship includes lots of stuff. And Chinese view the relationship to the honour and trust. They think of the relationship to major honour and trust. And Chinese people deal with other person they think use the relationship can major is that the guy to trustworth. And also to build the relationship, to show myself the whole, it's hard to describe...
- I understand you. Ha-ha.
- Me: ha-ha. That's good then.
- Like we do business with each other, I want to build a relationship with him, he must to show his ...
- Sincerity.
- Ya, sincerity.
- To do it.
- Me: Do you think it's, hmm, what's the word, do you think it's a bit suspicious that the Germans are pushing so hard? That they want to do it right now?
- Yeah, lots of pressure. Because in China, they don't want to do something without relationship...
- Without benefit.
- Me: Without what?
- Without benefits.
- Na, benefit is only one, but relationship too.
- Ya, to be honest, I'm totally disagree with this scenario. Because in a real situation, the Chinese would be maybe more eager to finalize this agreement instead of German manager to push it. I think in a real situation it's opposite.
- Me: Oh, do you think the Chinese would push harder?
- Yes.
- Me: Do you think that's too polite for a Chinese answer? Or to indirect?
- I think the conversation is normal, except the scenario gives us in this situation that the German manager push this. In China, if you're a foreigner from the West, in China the local people, the more you have money, input, instead of push ... we are eager to get the money. Input and investment instead of we have to build a relationship first. That's not in real.
- Me: Do you think, can I ask you, the answer from the Chinese, do you think that is an answer that would be too indirect? Do you think in a business ...
- Kind of indirect, yeah.
- Me: Or do you think it's more direct?
- For me, we in Chinese business want to sign a contract, we need to do some ceremony. Like, to know each other more, know more each other. To do some business or something. That's the Chinese way. But if Chinese do with a Western, it's kind of directly. You come, we have a dinner, and then we do something. We tell them we need more...
- Yeah, I think maybe in generally, if we have money, we have everything, we can start business immediately. But I think in China, when we have all things,

how to say that, but we should know your company first. Yeah, we need time to know you.

34:56 min

- Me: Ok, so you are saying you need time to get to know the other company.
- Yeah, I think so.
- Yeah. Like to build a relationship. To more know each other.
- I think know each other already done in the front.
- But not enough. But not enough.
- Me: Is that between two Chinese companies? Or a German and Chinese?
- Yeah, because here the first thing is, they already have discussion. But for a Chinese that is not enough. That is too formal. Formal business. We need to know you more, how honest you are. How can I trust you? Why do you come here to do something together. I can't (*inaudible*) what kind of person you are. From the normal sense. Like a strategy.
- Yeah I think the most important thing is how can I trust you? Yeah.
- Yeah.
- Yeah, for the culture, I think the Chinese why they think this is because the Chinese think of they want to do something in a long-term (*inaudible*), like a big picture. So a long-term product. Because the Germans asked for the current, the profit and they think want the money quickly, quickly. But for Chinese, we think, umm, we can't go to the profit now, but how about the long-term...
- I don't think it's fast.
- Me: You think what?
- (*If I; conversation not clear*) was profit why not become a friend? But without the profit Germans maybe find other company to cooperate. If you want to do business to me, you should be honest to me. And I should be honest to you. Like, we need to trust each other. So we can earn more profit in the longer term. So this kind to build a relationship is more worth than to do some lawyer, black white document. Because the relationship is like (*intendable/unchangeable sense; conversation not clear*), it's harder to measure, it's harder to touch. We can get this stuff only from people. People (*inaudible*).
- Me: That's really interesting, and I'm glad about that. Ok, do you think, I asked that before, but I got a bit of mixed answers, would you say the Chinese communicate rather direct or rather indirect in that scenario? Do you think what they say, would that be a direct message or rather indirect message?
- You mean the Chinese style?
- Me: Ya, the Chinese communication style.
- For the Western view I think it's indirect. Because it's hard the Chinese would tell Western people, we need to do something together to know each other more. You just told them it's different from Western way. So with the information from the German we may be a little bit confused. So what kind of the Western way.
- Me: But, would you consider this as direct or indirect from your personal perspective? All of you.
- Hmm ya.
- Me: Do you think that's a pretty direct or rather indirect ...?
- Hmm, direct?

- I think it's direct.
- Me: Do you think that both parties, the Chinese and the Germans, are honest to each other? Or do you think that there is maybe something else going on?
- Honest to each other? Na (inaudible).
- Me: Or do you think the way they communicate, or what they say is really honest? They have nothing to hide, it's just negotiations. Or do you think there is anything else going on?
- Yeah I think it's honest. Between them.
- Honest, I agree.
- Me: Ok. Would you perceive the German as being too direct in this scenario, or do you think that's just a normal communication style?
- I think it's alright.
- Me: Ya?
- Ya. But that's just me, not for everyone else.
- Who made this scenario?
- Me: That was a video transcript from a, I think the authors of the video were Chinese and US American. So they did it together. The thing is it is a teaching material thing, so it was a quite artificial setting. So they set it up to teach something to emphasize some differences, so yeah maybe not very authentic.
- Me: So you are all ok with the German way?
- Yeah.
- Listen to this myself, I accept this way. But maybe I'm wrong.
- Kind of too rude. Because I can feel the pressure. Not rude I mean, I can feel the pressure and from the pressure I maybe think little bit rude.
- Little bit rude from the Germans?
- Yeah. If the Chinese speaker maybe used a ...
- Yeah Chinese don't like direct.
- Yeah don't because totally you can see what they want and not. But for Chinese talking you need to go back to think about it. Oh, he want it this way.

42:13 min

- That's what you prefer. Ha-ha.
- Yeah.
- Sometimes you think too much.
- Yeah, sometimes you think too much.
- And maybe never get the point.
- Just get you an idea, talk about what you think.
- Me: Ok, would you perceive the Germans as trustworthy due to the way they communicate?
- For me, because it's after discussions and negotiations they have some conflict and they come to a solution and they have prepared the proposal and equally fair management structure and clarify equity issues, so it's fair enough.
- Me: Ok, so would there be any reason why you would say, ah maybe not? Don't really trust them.
- Maybe there's some problem happening in the future, but at the present there is nothing.
- Me: What do the others think?
- Yeah, yeah, why not. You already you money in, so why not trust you.

- Me: Ok, that's alright. We are actually going through this quite quickly, I'm quite impressed. Ok I have a little scale. And I would just like to ask you, on this scale from one to seven, with one being completely dishonest and seven being completely honest, to what extent do you believe that the Germans are being honest with the Chinese? I know we almost answered this before, but if you would give it a number, do you think they are really honest with the Chinese?
- Ya. 6 is my choice.
- Between 4 and 5.
- Me: Ya, how come?
- 5.
- 5 is a ??
- Me: Five would be between neutral and completely trustworthy.
- 6.
- Business is still business though. They should be friendly, they get benefit from each other, so they would not do anything that no profit at all.
- Me: That's alright.
- Me: And how trustworthy would you consider the Germans to be? I know that might sound quite similar, but... Would you differentiate between how honest they are and how trustworthy they are?
- Sorry, I'm not quite sure about the question.
- The Germans?
- Me: Yes, that's just for Germans, like how honest you would the Germans consider to be.

46:45 min

- So question one like a Western-Chinese side to see how German they are?
- Me: No, no, how you as Chinese ...
- From our side?
- Me: Yes. From your Chinese perspective. Would you differentiate though? Would you differentiate between honesty and trustworthiness? In that scenario?
- Hmm honesty, trustworth. Kind of similar.
- Between 4 and 5.
- What's the difference?
- Me: No, no, that's a good point. I was saying they might sound similar.
- I still would choose 5.
- Me: Ok, so you would say the same? Or would you make any difference?
- I would say 6.
- Because I have principal, don't totally trust, so maybe 5.
- Me: Ok, thanks. Ok, last question is probably quite similar. Well, almost the last. Would you start a serious relationship with the Germans? In this scenario? Or would there be anything that you would say, ah, not like that.
- You mean, would you like to build a relationship with German?
- Me: Yes.
- Yes, of course want to build a relationship. I want to build a relationship you know what kind of company they are.
- Me: Would you start a business relationship with them?
- Yes.

- Yes, business is always relationship. You can't do business without relationship.
- Me: Ok, if you were in a situation where you have to decide whether or not you want to start a business relationship with someone else, in this case with the German, what would your assessment of trust be based on? Would there be any elements that you would say for that and that reason I would start a relationship with them or I am going to trust them... Or because of this and that I'm not going to trust them, so I don't want to start a relationship with them.
- Like before they do business or after?
- Me: Would you do business first and then start a relationship though?
- It goes together at the same time.
- Me: Ya. Is there anything in particular that you would say, well that's the reason why I would start a business relationship with them? Or that's the reason why I would not trust them, for whatever reason. Due to the way they talk to you.
- Me: Difficult question?
- Na, it's not a difficult question, I don't know, in Germany they doing business without relationship?
- Me: You could.
- You could? Oh, really?
- Me: Ya.
- But I mean this relationship, not only business relationship. You need some kind of friendly relationship.
- Me: You need that for business?
- Because later on it will be useful in the future.
- Yeah, later on, in the future. Friendship and you take care of each other is more trustful.

50:50 min

- Yeah, I think so.
- In many years when you are in trouble, you can help each other.
- That's true.
- So, if you say in German people can do business without relationship is possible, so what kind of size of this business?
- Me: Well, it's just a different structure. In Germany, especially social relationships are not important, especially not when it comes to business deals. Germans would start a business relationship with signing a contract, that's the first step. And once you signed the contract then you can start building up a relationship. So that's probably the biggest difference.
- Ya, in China accept business we would focus on ... we have dinner together maybe, get more drinking, we check everything out between people.
- Yes, we focus more on this kind of things.
- Me: Do you think it would be possible to start a business relationship, or business, with someone when you don't have a social relationship with them? Or don't have any kind of relationship? Before you start. Would that be possible in China?

52:35 min

- Without a relationship you can, but you need a lot time to know that person ... what kind of guy.

- Me: Would it be common though?
- It's common. Because you start a business, you have no relationship with everybody. You chose one to build a relationship, and that's the normal way. The easier way for people, somebody introduced to me some guy to do business with and they have already business relationship with that other guy, it means that he's trustful, trustworthy. And then maybe it takes less time to know his background because of the background from my friend.
- It's hard to say, for long term business you have to set up a relationship.
- Yeah, see I show you like this. (*Participant drawing a sketch*) If this in China is me, without my friend I go directly to this man to do business, but I need more time to know him better. But if my friend introduces me to him, I think that saves lots of time because other people tell the background. Maybe not as useful, but at least you know something.
- But here, between a German and a Chinese company, how do you find someone to introduce you.
- No, it's hard to find, that's why the German go directly to me without the other introduce. So I feel like, oh what kind of guy is that? What kind of company? I think this is everybody to worry about. Because you do business in China, like this kind of trust, knowing a person, good credit, rating. Not like in Western where trust each other have like a system.
- The culture between China and the Western system, I think from my experience doing business is more difficult in China than in a Western country. Because they have no credit proof. Because in China they have no credit system.
- Me: No credit system?
- Like system, like a credit card, no credit. Like how to measure your credit.
- Me: Ah. Ok.
- So you need to use that kind of relationship ...
- Me: like evaluation of...
- Yeah, yeah.
- If you here, for example, want to get a credit card, it's very easy, you just get it. But in China, if you want to apply for a credit card, maybe bank needs time to understudy/understand, that is a difference.
- We need more stuff to guarantee, to ensure.
- Confuses you right?
- Me: Yes. Ha-ha. It's quite interesting though.
- Yes it is interesting.
- Never do business in China. Ha-ha.
- Me: Is that your recommendation? Ok, I will think of that. Ok, I think that was scenario one. If you want to have a look at scenario two, please. It's a short one.

57:11-59:32 min

- Me: Help yourselves to some food and drinks.
- So what's the question for scenario two?
- Me: I'd like to wait till everyone has read it.
- Me: All good? All finished?
- Yes.

- Me: Are you all ok with the scenario or are there any questions? Because I had some questions in the past.
- Yes.
- Me: Ok, do you trust Dr. Mueller that he needs to check with his organization? Or why would he say that?
- Pardon me?
- Me: Do you think that he needs to check with his organization or might there be another reason why ...
- Yeah, why not.
- Me: Does everyone think so?
- Yeah.
- Me: Yeah?
- Yeah.
- Me: Ok, I didn't expect that but alright.
- Because he already met him.
- Me: Do you think that his answer is a pretty direct and straightforward statement of his availability or do you think it's a rather indirect statement of something else?
- I think it's direct.
- Which side?
- Both sides.
- Me: No, no, from your perspective, what do you think? Is that a direct or an indirect reply?
- You mean the German side?
- Me: No. no. just your perception on this answer. Do you think that the answer this professor gave is a direct or an indirect statement?
- Indirect.
- Me: Indirect?
- See, the German side, he first says that he was interested, this gives you a positive signal. That means he wants to go, maybe a little bit want to go. But the second message, he told the grant research won't let him teaching. So that gives you a signal that's maybe negative. So next one don't know when to start the credit, so this like a neutral, medium, not negative, not positive. So next he replies that there's more teaching, more research, that's negative. I think. And the next, ask the administrator is neutral, kind of negative. He want to find some excuse to reject. For me, I think. So positive, negative, neutral, negative, so two negative, one positive, so for this information I think he doesn't want to go.
- Me: So, you say it's an indirect message?
- It's too much curved. Just to tell you more the negative information.
- Me: So what do you think is he actually trying to say?
- He tries to say I don't want to go.
- See, indirect.
- Me: Yeah. What do the others think?
- I think it's direct.
- Yeah, it's direct.
- Direct.
- He don't want to go but I have some other things blah blah blah.

- For me I would say it's too much information. So tell me, I don't want to go.
- Me: Ok, alright, I got to rethink my questions. Ha-ha. Good I have this focus group, I think I learned a lot today.
- So you know Chinese better.
- Me: Do you think that due to the length of the answer, like due to all the information that Professor gives you, does that make it more direct or more indirect? Does it make a difference how long the answer is?

01:04:05 min

- I think this is a reasonable excuse, to explain. It's not unreasonable. Probably this is a real situation, he needs to check with his employer. I don't think it's artificial excuse.
- Me: What do you think? You said it's indirect, do you think it makes it more indirect that he gives you so much information on the background?
- This German Dr. speaks like an Asian where you try to be polite. In total there's no reject, there's no 'no' that gives you an excuse to ...
- But it's all very directly, the two of them. He need to go ask, he had to ask and then the whole conversation just end up no news from each other. That's just a beginning. They don't know what's happening.
- They don't need to tell too much. That's one of the key reasons.
- *Inaudible.*
- See, he uses his reason, and he uses the schools reason, both together to tell (*inaudible*).
- Me: Would you trust the professor that he is honest with you?
- Yeah, do trust.
- Yeah.
- Yeah, I always trust people.
- Me: You always trust people?
- Yeah, except you show me something to contrast. Otherwise I will trust people.
- Me: What do the others think? Would you agree with what that statement?
- I just agree with that. I trust what he said.
- Yeah I trust like this. Because he told me the truth. Honest to me.

01:06:38 min

- Me: Why would you say you trust him that he is honest with you when you say it's actually an indirect answer?
- I think it's too much information. And for me a reply ... it's hard ... If I replied I don't want to go, I have lots of stuff to do by myself...
- Me: Ok, ok I got you. So what is the reason that you would trust him? Why do you think he's honest with you?
- Because he tells the Chinese Dr. what are his feelings about if he (*uses too much of other thing; conversation not clear*).
- It's not feeling, it's fact.
- The truth.
- Yeah, it's the fact but I can't, even with this information, for me that information is kind of feeling.
- Yeah I think maybe in German ...
- Like, if you invite me to have dinner, if I can't go, maybe have other important things, I will tell you maybe my friends girlfriends birthday and I need to go to

that party and tell to you, maybe you can judge, ok maybe that friend is very close, is very important for this dinner, so I can't go to that. Kind of felling.

- Me: Ok.
- For the honest, tell the other party how you are feeling, I think this is honest and trust.
- Yeah I think maybe he needed time to ask these things for university, he had to decide himself.
- It's not a problem, he just needed to, both sides, the Chinese and German, just need to follow up, but nobody followed up.
- Me: Follow up, yea. Would you expect to hear from any of them again? What do you think whose turn would it be to contact whom?

01:10:00 min

- I think both need to, at least the Chinese guy need to ask again.
- Yeah.
- And the German guy need to tell the time. Respect each other. But this suddenly stop. To me act strange. Not polite.
- Me: So you think it would be the Chinese turn to contact the German again?
- It it's me, I'm not going to chase him down again. Because if he things I'm very eager for him to come, so he maybe thinks I'm so desperate, I need you. So he maybe higher your price.
- Me: Would you expect to hear from the German again? After that message?
- Yeah, if it's me..
- Yeah if it's me I need reply and tell ok, listen, maybe you have no time to come here. That's fair enough for your research. But reflect that information back to that person. And you think oh this is what you mean. Kind of a relationship build with each other.
- Yeah, if it is me, from a Chinese side, for example I need to chase for the German side, I would say what date is the final date? Otherwise I'm looking for another opportunity or choice instead of just say...
- To be honest to each other.
- I think for respect. He don't directly says no, I think this is to respect each other. You were saying it's an excuse just to respect the Chinese guy.
- Why are you saying the German side he don't want to go? You say that Germany he don't want to go?
- My understanding is that he is interested but he has blah blah blah ...
- That is probably a real situation.
- Me: So, do you think he wants to go or he doesn't want to go?
- He doesn't.
- Me: You think he doesn't wants to go?
- Yeah.
- Me: But you said it's a direct statement, so do you think it's a direct statement of facts that he wants to go but he has to check or do you think that it's more an indirect message saying well, thanks for the invite but actually I'm not interested. That would be an indirect way to say, no sorry.
- If it's me, I don't want to go I would say this is very interesting but I have blah blah blah...
- Me: So you think ...
- For my way this is respect each other. I don't want to say 'no'.

- Me: So who thinks that the German guy actually wants to go to China?
- It's hard to answer. It depends on the situation.
- Me: Yes, I know. So if you would get that kind of answer.
- Depends on how deep their relationship is.
- Me: Oh, they just know each other, they are not best friends, they just met each other.
- If he really wanted to go, I think he need to ask blah blah first. And then I'll give you answer back later. Maybe something like that.
- I don't know why they don't want to go. I mean why?
- Me: Oh, there's no right or wrong answer what you think this answer means.
- I mean if you got opportunity, of course you want to go.
- But you waste your time to do your research. That is your main thing.
- Me: if you just look at his response, just the way he answers, would you perceive it as a yes or as a no? Yes, I want to go, I just need to check something or no, thanks, but actually I'm not interested.
- I think it's a yes.
- It's a 50:50.
- Me: ha-ha, that's not a good answer.
- You have a doubt here though. I'm interested but he wants to check with his university but at the same time, given that he has been grant for free, freeing from teaching responsibilities for three years. If that says in Chinese someone, it means that you are not really interested. You wouldn't tell someone about this thing, like what he's telling now. So it's like a 50:50, inside him. And this whole thing is not finalized yet. Because they didn't hear from each other again. It's like the basic what we see here and we couldn't so far finalize the whole thing.
- I think, because I say yes, because if the German guy really don't want to go, they just say no, I got three years contract...
- He already reflect the information.
- But he said we need to check. I need to check.
- Yeah. That's what he said, he need to check. It's not finalized yet. 50:50.
- Yeah, 50:50.
- But it means, he's interested.

01:16:05min. Everyone talking.

- Yeah this second he can be interested, but the other second he wouldn't be interested. You can't finalize it from here.
- They have to reply each other.
- Me: What is your perception, do you think it would be the Chinese Professors turn to get back to the German one and ask, hey what's up? Or do you think it's the German guys turn to go back to the Chinese?
- I think it's the Chinese turn.
- Yeah.
- He invited him, so you have to show your sincerity.
- If you ask somebody to do something for you ...
- So he had to follow up.
- Yeah.
- Because here he said he need to find out from someone, so if there's no replying you have to give him some time. Because you got a doubt here. So

you have to understand that at this point he think he just gives time and then try to ask again.

- Me: So, ok. Question again: Would you trust him that he is honest with you as to his availability? That he's really saying the truth here? Do you think he has to check?
- Yeah, good, and honest.
- Me: You still think...
- I trust him.
- Trust.
- I don't like saying I trust him, but I think he's telling the truth.
- Yeah, this guy is good, he's honest with me.
- Me: What makes you think so?

01:18:00 min

- Because if he lies or not telling the truth, he won't get anything from here though.
- Maybe behind the scenes...
- It's hard to tell.
- Me: Ok, let's have a look at my little scale again. Ok, to what extend would you trust the German that he's honest with you? Or telling you the truth?
- 6.
- 6.
- 5.
- 6.
- Me: Sweet, thanks. That was it to scenario two. I just have some quick questions as to improve intercultural communication issues. I'd like to ask you for some recommendations, what do you think could be done differently to avoid intercultural miscommunication. Do you think there's anything that's of particular importance?
- I think human to human, the basic things, the basic needs are all the same. Just the culture difference ... Just to be honest to each other...
- Me: How would you define honesty though?
- Hmm?
- Me: What do you mean with honesty?
- Honesty. Like you and me from different country, I think I feel hungry, you feel hungry, we all want to eat...
- Me: So, the basic instincts.
- Ya, for example, I know you're hungry, I know hungry means I want to eat something ...
- Me: So honesty is, is honesty a very important value in China? To be honest to each other, is that highly valued?
- No.
- Na, very low. So that's why they need to have good relationship to get other way to know...
- What's your question again?
- Me: If you have any recommendations or any ideas ...
- Na, na about the ...
- Me: Ah, about the honesty? How important would you consider honesty to be? In the Chinese culture? Would you say ...

- In Chinese culture, I think in any culture, honesty is universal.
- Me: Ah, ok, it's actually not. So it's important for Chinese?
- Of course.
- I think standing on the other side, you use another way of thinking. Like we are talking and I think, ah, what do you want from me? You want from me tell you the truth like it is. To use other way of thinking.
- So, can I ask you a question?
- Yes.
- Do you like honest people? Yes or no?
- Yes.
- Yes, ok it means ...
- Me: What does honesty involve for you? Does honesty mean open and direct, when it comes to communication? Is that a relationship for you? To be honest and open and direct and straightforward in communication? Is that the same for you or would you differentiate?
- You can't just say it's open or... It's very depending which person you deal with. You can't just say it's open or direct to deal with people, no. It's not such simple. Of course we like people more open, more direct, we like it.
- Me: You do? In communication styles? When someone is relay direct and straightforward? And saying sorry, that was really not good and I don't like it?
- Yes, yes. Sometimes it means it's stupid. I like people, I like you to be open, to be direct to me. But sometimes when you show you're direct, when you show you're open, it means you are stupid.
- Like a disclosure of ... you disclose...
- It very depends.
- Me: Why does it mean you're stupid?
- In China there's a phrase like "You tell more, you are going to lose more". Because you disclose your weakness to other people.
- Yeah, *inaudible*.
- So that's why currently people have close friends for talking. If I tell you feelings, if I tell you something.
- Me: Ok, coming back to your stupid thing. Why is it stupid? Because in Germany it's a different perception.
- Yeah, why stupid?
- Stupid of what? For what?
- Me: If you talk too much, if you're too open and direct.
- It's like a philosophy, not like ...
- It depends, how you are going to talk about or what.
- Yeah.
- Sometimes you feel, for example, actually you don't know too much, you just shut up. If you don't know too much, you are still ...
- Me: Is that like the saying "Silence is gold"?
- Yeah. Do you know what I mean?
- Me: Yes. Ok, last question...
- Yeah it means I'm very open, I'm very direct. It means I'm stupid. Ha-ha.
- Like telling us what he is thinking.
- Me: Oh, I must be a really stupid person then. Ok, can I ask you a last question? Do you think there is any miscommunication going on in this last

scenario? Or what do you think is the reason why these two don't hear from each other again?

- No I don't think there is something wrong between this two conversation. They just missed to follow up. Either party. That's all. I can't see anything wrong with either the Chinese or the German.
- Maybe this German guy had to say the truth, but from the Chinese guy understanding he maybe think it's an excuse, he maybe don't want to come. Why they don't get back to each other.
- Me: Ok, cool. Well that was it actually. Thank you very much; I think I learned a lot today. That was really interesting. Thank you.

Appendix G: Transcript of focus group C (New Zealand)

Focus group C (New Zealand) – audio transcript

Date: 01.12.2010, 6.30 – 7.45 pm.

Participants: 4 Participants, 2 male and 2 female.

Min = minute

Transcript:

- Me: Ok, that was the video clip. I forgot to record it, but that's alright. Do you have any questions so far? No, all good? Ok, question one, how would you describe the communication style of the manager? Of the guy in the video scene?
- Direct.
- Confrontational.
- Very aggressive.
- Me: Anything else, that sticks out?
- He formed his opinion before he spoke to her.
- His body language is quite aggressive as well. He's leaning over the table.
- Me: What do you think why he is using such an aggressive or direct approach?
- I would call that inappropriate.
- Me: So why do you think he's doing it like that?
- Because he thinks that's ok. Because he thinks that a normal way for management, whether he thinks it's management or himself, that's probably his way of knowing how to communicate.
- Me: Ok, so you said you don't think it's appropriate, what do you think, do you think this is an appropriate way to speak to someone else? Or to your employee?
- I don't think it is, but I work with people who do that.
- Me: Kiwis?
- Ya. And it's just accepted. Because they own the company, so they can basically talk to you as they want.
- Ya. I find it not intimidating but offensive, slightly for myself. I would find it offensive and put my back up. But I must agree, that's how some managers do communicate.
- Me: Would you feel insulted?
- I would a little bit. I think it's just a little bit too, not abrupt, but in my face. It's not polite, he's not using his manners, it's impolite.
- He was a bit short on words. He would have said, look, I got this report, could you ..., who put it together, could we sit down and just talk about a few things?
- Or given it some pace to begin with. Maybe. To start it off nicely. Not go straight into the issues.
- Me: What do you think?
- It's just the way he communicates. He may have done it better by saying to her, can I just see you in a couple of minutes and speak to you about this. So she has time to think about it first. Instead of putting her on the spot.
- Ya.

- I think it's pretty clear that he just looks like an ignorant fool.
- Me: What do you think his intentions are? Do you think he really just wants to find out who did that report or?
- He obviously has some sort of recrimination in mind for that person who authored the report. It looks to me like he wants to circumvent proper channels. You don't go directly to the staff member, you go to their manager and follow the chain of command.
- Me: That would be the proper channel for you?
- Yeah, yeah. For a big boss or manager to go directly to the staff member involved would seem to me a bit inappropriate. That's just not the way things are meant to be done. Follow the steps. Because any employee faced with top-level management, coming in with that kind of attitude, is going to be very rattle.

04:40 min

- And probably he is going to answer to somebody. I don't think he is the boss. I'm assuming he's not the boss. I don't think the boss would come in and do that. That means he probably has to answer to someone else. So maybe he is wanting to pinpoint the problem, or pass the bucks, so he doesn't get it on his shoulders, maybe.
- Me: Ya, fair enough.
- Speculation.
- Me: Would you prefer, you say it's a direct way to communicate with someone, would you prefer, in an office or business situation, would you prefer direct communication over indirect?
- It's not just the fact that it's direct, that's the problem. It's aggressive and insulting.
- Impolite.
- And impolite. And that's the problem. If he had said, we had this report being written, we think it's below standard and we have a problem with that and would like to address it. That's direct, you can totally be direct without ...
- Me: Yes, yes.
- Got you. I agree.
- In saying that we don't know the facts but for me, I don't know the facts behind it, she may have ask him (*not*) to be direct. Because I know Chinese like to be direct.
- Me: Sweet, that was it to the DVD scenario. I think that was the fastest that I ever did that. It's really interesting to see the differences to all the other groups. Do you have any question son that?
- No.
- Me: Ok, can I please ask you to read scenario one.

06:20-08:14 min

- Me: All good? Any questions?
- No.
- Me: Ok, what do you think are the reasons that the German managers insist on signing the contract right now? That he's pushing so hard? Or do you think he's pushing hard? To sign the contract?
- Well, yeah. The German company seems to assume it's a foregoing conclusion.
- Me: It's what?

- A foregoing conclusion. Like it's already decided. They seemed to assume that signing the deal is just a formality and all decisions have actually been made.
- I would have just said that it's quite normal that they wanting before they actually investing more time and money and taking it any further. They want to be sure that it's going to happen.
- Yeah for me it's just the Western way of doing business. We like to get things done straight away because time is money, and we can back things up, and save our ass by putting good contracts behind us. As opposed to the Chinese who like to, for example, go out and have dinner first, talk about life and then when you get on, talk about business. And the Chinese, from what I experienced from them, they are all about the relationships first and then business later. Which I think is a better way to do business, because you develop those trusting relationships.
- Me: So you would prefer that?
- Yes.
- Me: What's common in New Zealand?
- Probably more towards the German way of..., or the German situation here.
- Yeah, I would say so. You rely on your lawyers and your contracts to protect you rather than solid personal relationships with other people involved.
- It would be an aspect of..., I think we would be slightly less direct then the Germans and we would have an aspect of getting to know the person. Maybe go for a coffee or a beer with them. Some sort of social interaction before we sign that deal. But certainly not like the Chinese. We probably sit a bit more between the Chinese and the Germans.
- I actually share office space at work, our companies are linked with an Asian investment company, so I work with eleven Chinese and Malaysian people, and definitely when they are doing business, our companies are sort of interlinked and they sort of filtering the aggressive Western way of doing things, it has to get filtered through various people before the Asian customers come in and they will only deal with people that they trust.
- Me: that's very interesting. Anything else? Nope. So, in this scenario, how would you describe the German communication style? Or the way they approach the situation? Is that quite normal for you or is that extreme in any kind of way?

11:48 min

- I would imagine that in a sort of boardroom setting, there would be, any European big company boardroom scenario that would be how communication would be done. In this situation I think it would be bizarre for somebody to ask, so how many children do you have, what school are they going to? That would seem strange to me.
- I think we would have done our homework beforehand and had the friendly meeting beforehand, possibly. And then once we get to the boardroom, that's when we, when it's on the table. We would have done the socializing or any other, before we even got to that point. Possibly.
- Me: Ok, would you need some kind of social whatever, before you go to the boardroom and sign the contract?
- I would have, personally, I would have an initial meeting, which would be a little bit formal but nothing of financials would really be fully discussed. It

would just be a contact, then possibly a meeting again of more of a social nature and then on the table. It would be one or two meetings. It wouldn't be that drawn out, but certainly it would be an initial, maybe one more and then the final.

- Me: Ok. What do the others think?
- I think if I was going to do a \$500m deal, I would have included certain cultural information in my due diligent.
- Absolutely, yeah.
- Me: Anything else on this?
- Yeah, I would definitely hire a Chinese advisor, communications advisor. To advise the company how to do business. You could possibly make more money that way.
- This is a scenario I could envisioning happening 20 years ago, but today I think anyone in charge of that much money would have more sense than to try approach it in this way. I could be wrong, but ...
- Me: So, do you think that the German way of talking to the other party is quite normal for you, as in a New Zealand environment, but do you think it's appropriate in this Chinese-German context?

14:14 min

- Obviously not, you don't get the required result.
- Yes, it is inappropriate for this situation. As already mentioned, they haven't done their homework, obviously, culturally. Because if it's big money, you don't want to lose this deal. You will have to get some advice.
- Me: Do you think that the Chinese and the Germans are both honest to each other? Do you think they are open and honest or do you think, someone is trying to screw someone else over?
- I think the Germans are being honest, because they are direct. From my experience with Germans, is what they say is what they'll do. The Chinese, you could imply that they are trying to hold something back, but to me it's just the way they do business. If anyone is holding something back I would have to, personally, say the Chinese. But in saying that, that's just the way they do business. I can't really judge them on that.
- To me it just comes across as if the Chinese just being cautious. I don't see it as any suggestion that they are being dishonest. Just cautious.
- Me: Ok, how would you describe the Chinese communication style? If you say they are just cautious.
- I think they are considerate of the greater whole. They put their heads together, they talk together. They won't make a decision on behalf, they talk first, they must go away and talk together and come to some agreement before any decisions made. They can't be like, you know we have a chain of command, or the Germans will, so these two Germans can make decisions on the spot, right now. Whereas they can't. They need to go back, talk, talk it out, make sure that they are all in consent with the final decision and then come back to the table. It's a completely different way of doing things.
- Me: Ok, but if you had to come up with a few words to describe the communication style of the Chinese, the way they answer, how would you describe it?
- It's very, it's subtle. It's obviously designed not to offend. It's designed to be inoffensive and ... It's a polite No.

- Me: It's a polite no?
- Yeah, it's an indirect no, we are not going to do what you want at this time. But here's an avenue for further negotiation.
- And the other side of that could be it's an actual yes, we are really interested but... but do it our way. So no, not right now, but yes we are interested. Because if you understood their culture you would know that it was actually yes.

17:48 min

- I know where I work, I'm often really confused about communication. Not between my boss and I, he's really direct and I'm relay direct, so that's fine, but between the other cultures and us. Because I always feel like, they are actually not saying exactly what they mean and I end up thinking one thing and they end up meaning something else. And it just gets really confusing, And it could be quite..., you could take offense if you were particularly that way inclined. Yeah, their communication styles aren't particularly direct. They are very meandering.
- The thing is sometimes they are and sometimes they aren't. I've actually just started going out with a Chinese girl, funnily enough, and she is sometimes very subtle and sometimes incredibly direct and blunt, well not blunt, but incredibly direct about things. She would say something about her feelings "and I was pissed off with you because of this and then I realized it's like this and that, so it's ok now"... And I'm like wow, if that was a Kiwi girl it would have taken me two month to figure this out. And you just say it. You are not going to make me play the guessing game: "You don't know what you have done wrong, do you?" Na, boom, it's straight out there. Even if I don't agree, it's good, because I don't have to play like hang on, replay the dates through my head, did I not open the door wide enough for her? Should I have offered to buy a desert as well? Whatever... ha-ha.
- Me: That's quite funny. Ok, back to the scenario. Do you think the Germans are trustworthy due to their communication style?
- Yes.
- Yep.
- I would say yes. He's very up front with what he wants.
- Yep.
- His communication style is very clear to me. So he says exactly how he feels, what they want.
- They are transparent. They have given a document with everything in there. Or that's how we think. But as far as we know. For me they would be.
- When the Chinese said initially no, we just wait a few month, they have said yep no problems but we want it done now.
- Me: So you think the way talk to the other party makes them trustworthy?
- Yeah, sorry, when he comes back to the Chinese he says we will be happy to visit you within the next few month, after we have closed the deal.
- Yeah.

21:21 min

- Me: Ok, anything ...?
- No, just the same.
- Me: What would you think about the Chinese? Would you trust them because of what they respond or what they say? Does that influence...

- Personally, I trust the Germans more.
- Me: How come?
- Previous experience. When I was in Europe for two month, I have never met a German that said something and never did it. They always did it, on time. And I've had experience with the Chinese this year, ripping my friend off who tutored them.
- Me: Oh, what?
- They said they would pay them \$40 and they turned up with all their mates, three or four times and never paid him.
- Me: So you draw only form your ...
- Personal experience, not this scenario. Yeah.
- Me: Doe s anyone else have...
- Yeah, generally Germans, as a rule, it's very rare for a German company to be caught with its pants down. They do exactly what they say they do, due to the nature of the contract. Again, it just comes down to previous experience. I've worked with German companies and I've never been ripped off by one. Whereas Chinese companies, China is a perceived, or pretty much is a corrupt country. So there is that suggestion that in a country where corruption is quite deep seated, you are going to think it's, in a political scene, it's going to be in a business sector as well. Whereas Germany has got a very low level of corruption. Almost as low as New Zealand. Least corrupt country in the world.
- Is that correct?
- Yes, three years running.

23:13 min

- Me: So apart from the previous or personally experience, would their communication style, or the way they respond to the Germans, would that influence whether or not you trust them?
- No, there is nothing in their communication style that would suggest impropriety to me. I would just instinctively be more cautious dealing with Chinese then Germans.
- And I would from my experience probably be slightly different. Having dealt with my own experience travelling quite a bit. And having had a good experience I would have understood, and I enjoyed the Germans directness, and I enjoy that, and I enjoy transparency, and I don't like, personally, too much beating around the bush. But at the same time I would be sympathetic and understanding to the Chinese needs, and also because of their culture. And I would start practicing Buddhism with the. That's would mine, be sort of my connotations with the Chinese. That's why I would trust them from a religious perspective actually, from an ethical perspective. Yes.
- You mean a country that appointed their own Dalai Lama because they didn't like the other one?
- But that's too much politics. That's bringing politics into the people. And when you are dealing with the public, you don't necessarily associate the political figures. And then give a blanket overview onto all the public.
- True, but this is not dealing with the public. This is dealing with a company, and every CEO of every company is a card carrying member of the Communist party. You have to be, it's the only way you can do business there.
- It doesn't mean they are all corrupt though.
- Na.

- And you have to be a little bit more..., and if you draw on experience that's fine and you'll understand it, and if you had had the experience, absolutely, you would be like oh.... But suppose that's instinct as well, by the people. I would tend to be a little bit softer then blankedly not trusting them.
- Oh no I don't blankedly not trust them. I'm just saying I would be a lot more cautious doing business with a Chinese company then I would with a German company.
- Yeah I'm not sure, I think I would give them both a fair, equal chance. And judge it on individual case I think. And I would do my own research into that company.
- Me: Fair enough. So you say you like the German transparency, what do you think about the Chinese way of rather talking around the point?
- It's the ambiguity of the Chinese. I think I would find it frustrating because I am myself, I like to be direct and I like people who are direct with me. So I would find it frustrating, but then, like I said, I would try being understanding to the culture.
- Me: Ok. So, you would be frustrated but not suspicious or anything?
- No, just frustrating. I just want to keep digging for more. I want more, and I want answers and I would try to push for time lines and deadlines. And trying to get at least some fixed deadlines. So I'm not left completely with nothing.
- Me: ok, what do the others think?
- I would just say I'm more draw towards the German way, because I'm a really direct person and I hate meandering.
- Me: It's really funny that everyone, you all say you like the direct way or you are rather direct, because form my experience with Kiwis, they are so not direct. They are so indirect. Seriously, I have so much trouble understanding what's going on.
- Oh yeah. True.
- I think it's harder to be indirect in German. It's just the language leads itself to being direct.
- Me: Hmm, maybe. Not sure, it's just our culture. It's just the way we grow up.... Ok, I actually have a little scale, but I'm not too sure if that's..., because you all said you would trust the Germans, so I'm not too sure how much sense this makes. But ok, that's the scale, from one to seven, with one being completely dishonest and seven being completely honest, what do you think how honest the Germans are with the Chinese?
- Just in this situation?
- Me: yes, sorry, just in this scenario.
- 6.
- 5.5.
- I would say probably 6. No business deal is ever completely honest. You always got something up your sleeve.
- Yeah.
- I would say 5.
- Me: What do you think how honest the Chinese are with the Germans?
- 5.
- I would say the same.
- Yeah the same.
- Me: Same?

- 5-5.5.

29:10 min

- Nothing in this would suggest that either of them would be any more dishonest than as normal good business practice. If I was going to distrust anybody in this scenario, it probably would be the Germans. Just in this case. The Germans are pushing for the contract to sign. The Chinese are actually not saying anything, so they are ...
- And the Germans have got the money.
- Yeah.
- There is no way the Chinese could be ripping them off in this particular situation. Unless they have already technical data or something that they are planning on stealing.
- Me: Ok, that might sound quite similar to you, but there is a little difference, at least for me. So, if I ask you again, from one to seven, how trustworthy do you consider the Germans to be in this scenario?
- 5.
- Again, about 6.
- Yep, the question does sound the same to me.
- Yeah, it does.
- Me: does it? Ok, well, it's...
- What is the difference?
- Me: The difference is that for some honesty and trust doesn't really relate. It's not really the same.
- Ah, yeah. Ok.
- Well, I think if a German company was going to rip you off, they would do it within the confines of their contract. They would not step outside the contract. They would obey all laws and still rip you off.

30:57 min

- Yeah there would be something missing in the contract. Some wording.
- Yeah there would be something contractual that get you (*inaudible*). Whereas the Chinese they wouldn't bother with that. They wouldn't worry about the contract.
- Or maybe make things a bit more difficult then. In the dealing with things. I don't know, I would say the same.
- Me: Ok, the last question. What would your assessment of trust be based on in this scenario, when you say you would trust them? What elements would you base your assessment on?
- Knowledge, firstly, of each company. I would draw on research. As much as I could from the people, from the company, on their business, on their history. Yeah, on research. That's all I would know, I think.
- Yes, about the same, I would say. I would instinctively be more wary of the Chinese, just because it's such a different..., because the culture is so different, so foreign to me than say German culture. And it would just come down to, you always got to be more cautious of the unknown.
- Me: So if you would have to stick to the scenario, would there be any elements in there, in this situation where you would say for this and that reason I'm going to trust them. Is there anything they do or say that influences your perception?

- I think they are both quite open, within their own communication styles. And the Chinese are quite open in saying they want to hang back and get to know the CEO first, before going forward. As much as the Germans are open and up front about wanting to get everything signed off, because..., all the paperwork has been done.
- Me: So that openness would be an aspect for you?
- Yeah, I mean if the Chinese come back and say, we will be in contact with you, or said yes to everything, and then done the opposite, then that wouldn't be trustworthy but they've actually set their cards on the table about how they expect things to go from here. The same way the Germans have set their cards on the table about how things should be done.
- Yes, I agree.
- Yeah, I think if the Chinese had something sneaky up their sleeve then they wouldn't be stalling the deal. They would be pushing for it to go ahead.
- Me: You reckon?
- Yeah I think the Chinese caution suggests to me that they don't have any inferior's motives.
- Yes. And also the fact that they have offered to meet with the CEO again means that they are still interested. And that they do want to take it further. So like you said, both in each of their communication styles, I would trust them based on each of their ways of doing things.
- Me: Ok. Cool. Cheers, I think that was scenario one. Can I please ask you to read scenario two. It's a bit shorter.

34:34-36:03 min

- Me: All ready?
- Yes.
- Me: Sweet. Do you have any question son this scenario? Is everything clear?
- Yes.
- Me: Because I had some trouble in the past, but ok. Do you think that the German professor Dr. Mueller really has to check with his institution?
- No, no. I think he's using an Asian way to save face, to really say he's not really interested. Because if he was, he wouldn't have gone in this long, convoluted speech and then he would have checked if he was interested and then he would have got back to the professor, but he's sort of saying yes, I'm interested and I'll check, but then never got back, which says he wasn't really interested.

37:00 min

- I don't know. I don't know. Possibly yes and possibly no, because if you see any institution, there is always someone that they are answering to. It's the HOD, whether it's the dean, or the CEO, whomever, of an organization. And there's money involved, that grant. And they have been given time off, that grant would specify certain conditions. And so it wouldn't surprise me too much if he had to go and find out what they were. He's getting a paid grant for three years, he may have certain projects he has to work on, he may have certain places he has to be. So maybe, maybe not. That would depend on the organization.
- I wonder why neither one of them got back to each other.
- Yeah I know that's the case. I know, I know. So that's the assumption. Why did the Dr. Xi not get back to him either? And why wasn't..., there was no

time said, say look, I call you in one week, or I call you in one month, or let's get back in touch at a certain time. Nothing like that has been said. From either of them.

- Me: So, if that would happen like that, what would you think? Would you think he's just stating the facts or that he's not interested?
- I just don't get why he wouldn't be interested!

Laughter.

- I think it could be either way. This is a very difficult story, because it could be either way. We don't know enough. I think though the fact, like you said, that he didn't get back to him indicates that it was a fob off. He's fobbing, he doesn't want to get back. Because normally the, directly, he would have emailed and said no I can't or yes I can. So I could jump to what you said and assume ... Because there was no further communication.
- Yes, I would definitely say face saving, because he wouldn't want the Chinese professor to feel offended if he said no, I'm not interested.
- Yea that's right. So maybe he understands the culture.
- Sounds darling bagging smelly.
- Ha-ha.
- I don't know. It depends on your professor.
- Me: Does that mean you think he's not interested?
- I think if he was genuinely interested he would have got at least got back to him, or try to find a way. I don't doubt that the details are correct. But anyone who is at that level in an organization like that probably could have made it happen.
- Yea.
- Mostly what I think research projects at that level, you could make an excuse to do just about anything and justify it as research.
- And his wording "I'm interested, BUT" I think might be the key here, with what he said. Because he might have otherwise said, hey yes sounds awesome, I'll definitely look into that, but I have to go ... So I think that's the key, the BUT. It sounds like he doesn't really want to.
- And I think the other thing is that he has got this grant that frees him from teaching responsibilities and gives him time to do research and writing full time, and the Chinese professor wants him to come and teach and give seminars on very specific research topics, he's got the opportunity to do this and the Chinese wants him to do that. So, I definitely think he's not interested.
- For me there is nothing here to suggest that, because this Chinese character was just on a study tour, so I don't think they have built up their relationship. I mean the Dr. Xi could have lost his number or anything. And if he has just been given a three years paid leave, the university will have to answer to the government, what certain things meet, and it would be a waste of government money to send this high level professor to go and just teach in China. When all he's doing is increasing China's productivity. He could get some experience like that, but for me there's nothing there to suggest that he's hiding anything back.
- Me: So do you think he's interested to go or do you think ...?
- Yes I think he is. Because he says "I'm interested".
- Me: Ok.
- Although we do have a saying 'everything before the but means nothing'.

Laughter.

- Me: I heard that before, that's funny.
- Also I'm thinking a guy like him probably gets ..., is obviously a very high level professor, probably gets a truckload, there's probably hundred universities around the world who would love to have him come and guest lecturing for a couple of months, and he probably gets a dozen invitations like this a year, and for him it's like ok. He's probably the kind of guy who's over the whoohoo free trip to China buzz, so it's more like, ok lecturing ... hmm, I just got three years off lecturing. Don't lecture to a bunch of students who need a translator to understand me...

Laughter again.

- Me: Can I just ask you, who of you thinks this is a polite no and who of you thinks that's just facts and he needs to check?
- I say polite no.
- Yea, polite no.
- I say facts.
- And I'm on defence. I can't make a decision, there's just not enough facts here, not enough information. Neutral.
- Me: Neutral is never good.
- I know, I'm sorry. I just can't make a decision. I don't know.

43:50

- Me: That's alright. Well, since you obviously have some trouble interpreting his message..., does the way he's talking influence whether or not you would trust him? That he's telling the truth, about his availability?
- The only way I don't trust him is because he didn't get back to him. There was no further ... The fact that they didn't hear from each other again is where it has gone wrong. And obviously he wasn't interested, because of that fact. But if I..., I can make the decision and say no, he's not interested, because he never got back to him. But if I just had that conversation, and it's not being a time span for not to get back to me then I don't know if he's not interested. Do you know what I mean? When I can make that assumption that he's not interested because he didn't get back to him. Obviously, he wasn't interested. But I'm stopping there. And that not getting back to him is not happened. And on that fact, I don't know.
- Me: Ok. What if he was just waiting on a reply from the other one?
- And then there you go. There might have been a lost phone number, maybe one is waiting on the other, maybe ...
- He's the one invited him, he should ring back. I'd feel rude ringing him.
- Maybe the other guy wasn't for real. There is all those assumptions.
- Me: What do the others think? Does that influence whether or not you would trust him? Or whether or not you would consider him being trustworthy?
- I don't see it as having any bearing or whatsoever on trust. If someone comes and offers you..., if one professor asks another to come and teach for two month in his university, I don't see there too much of an alteriate motive there. I mean Beijing is a fairly safe city, apart from the drivers. Ha-ha.
- Me: Ok, thanks. Looking at my scale again... As you, obviously, connect honesty and trustworthiness, I'm just going to ask you once. To what extend do you believe that the German guy is being honest, as to his availability? So that he's telling the truth and that he's not making an excuse?

- Honest or trustworthy?
- Me: Ah, now you differentiate?
- Yeah, for me trust is more than honesty.
- Me: Ah, ok, there you go. So we make it to things then. Do you think he's honest as to his availability? That he has to check.., there's the grant and he has to check.
- 4 for me.
- Me: Neutral, ah. Ha-ha.
- Yeah I would also say neutral because I don't know. It could be true, could be not.
- I would say 2 because I think he's definitely not being honest.
- What are we on? Honest.
- Me: honesty. That there is the grant and he needs to check.
- I'll go in the middle. I'll say...
- Me: I thought you were saying ...
- No, I mean like I said, as far as I ... We are talking about honesty here, I think he might be thinking, yeah, teaching a couple of month in Beijing might be alright.
- Me: No, no. Do you think he's honest that there is that grant and that he has to check?
- Oh that? Yeah, I would say ... Just on the specific details on his ...
- Me: Yea, or do you think...
- No, I would say 7.
- Oh, yeah I misinterpreted...
- Me: Na, like is he honest in the way that he says there is that grant, I have to check, then he would be honest. But you said no, I actually think he doesn't want to go, so he wouldn't be honest. Would he?
- Oh I think he might, sort of want to go, but I think he might be vaguely interested in going, but as far as I think the actual details that he has put about the grant and the process that he has to go through to get approval to do it, I think he's a hundred percent honest with that. I don't doubt the details.
- Me: So you think there is a grant and ...
- I think he's a little bit interested and everything he said one hundred percent correct. I don't think he has made up any of those details. I think it's all a hundred percent.
- Me: So you actually do think that this is just a direct statement of facts?
- Yea.
- Me: So he's not saying sorry, I'm not interested.
- I think what he means by interested is, I'm sort of considering it a bit, I'm vaguely... I think he means I'm a little bit interested.

49:40 min

- I think he could be saving face, like you said, and not be interested, but the facts are whether he's interested or not, he has to check. With his grant, or superior. If he was completely not interested, I think, being from his culture, he possibly would have just said no. But then if he studied culture and understands culture and is trying to save face, then he may not have, so there's a lot of variables.

- Me: No, no. The question is actually, do you think that there is a grant and do you ...
- Yes.
- Yes, I think there is.
- Yeah.
- I think there is a chance there is a grant.
- He could have said, sorry I'm too busy studying...
- I'm busy...
- He could have made up ...
- So I shift mine to 7 as well, and say there is a very likely chance there is a grant.
- Me: So you think there is a grant?
- Yes.
- Yeah.
- Because he could have used many other excuses to say no.
- Family, business.
- Yeah, if there was no grant, and he was studying, he could have just said he's busy. Just that easy. I'm teaching, too many commitments.
- Ya.
- Because the study grant would suggest that he does have the time. Whereas if he was lecturing full-time, had a full schedule of lectures, and marking and everything, then he could just say then, and he wanted to make an excuse, he could have just said that. I have a full-time job, I can't just bugger off for two month.
- I'd love to but I just can't.
- This would actually suggest that he's a little bit interested, not very, I don't think he's very interested, but he's a bit interested and it might work because of this.
- Yeah, I agree.
- Yeah I think he's actually a hundred percent honest. Don't doubt him for a moment.
- Me: So you are saying that he's honest, there is a grant and that he needs to check. And this is not just an excuse to say no, I don't want to go.
- Ya.
- I think he's honest about all the details, but I think he's honest in the way as well that he's using it as a possible out. If he goes away and sleeps on it and then decides he doesn't want to pursue it any further.
- He's keeping his options open.
- Yeah. Smart man.
- Ha-ha, well, he's a professor.
- Me: So would your assessment of trustworthiness be the same? Or would that be different?
- Yeah, I would trust him.
- Yeah, I trust him. He has not given any reason for me not to trust him.
- Fairly honest and accurate assessment of the situation.
- I don't get the not calling each other back. That's the issues. But if we stop there, then, if there would be no not calling back, just assuming that's where you would want us to stop, we just had that conversation, is that what you ...?

- Me: No, that was part of it.
- “I’ll check with the administrators to get approval.” He never actually said he was going to... He never made any statement that he was going to get back to him. He just implied it.
- No, he didn’t. Yeah.
- He just implied it.
- Yap. There is no I’ll ring you in a week, or as soon as I hear something I’ll call you back.
- Yeah, they might have said no. Or the Chinese guys university may (*have said no that afternoon; conversation not clear*).
- And the fact that he said I’m interested, not, ah, that sounds like a wonderful opportunity, I’m really excited about...
- BUT
- ... but just, I’m interested. I’m interested in a lot of things, but it doesn’t necessarily mean I’m going to actually pursue them. There is a lot of things I’m interested in that I may pursue at some point if the opportunity arises.

53:44 min

- This is difficult, because you could interpret this in a number of ways. Yeah, you really could.
- Yeah.
- Me: Yeah, that’s it. Thank you. Ok, cool, I think that was it actually. That was the questions to this scenario anyways. I would just like to ask you some general things about intercultural communication rather some recommendations what you would think or could think of how scenarios like this..., how miscommunication could be avoided. Like in these scenarios, the video and the two written ones, is there anything you would say this and that would help improve communication or avoid miscommunication?
- Knowledge. I think it all comes down to knowing. Knowing who they are, what their culture is, how they communicate, how they do business. And once you have that knowledge, I think you are half way there.
- Yeah, experiencing their culture. Before this year, I didn’t have any German or Chinese friends and after spending a lot of time with them I understand how they operate. To me these scenarios, the first one especially, is just communication styles. I can’t read too much into it, because it’s the way they communicate.
- Ya.
- It was total lack of knowledge on behalf of the Germans, as to how Chinese do business. And if it’s that big a deal, and if it’s that much money, you really, like you guys have said, you go in with a lot more knowledge, and a lot more support, and translators and the whole lot.
- And you are doing business in their country, so if anything, it should be there way.
- Yeah.
- Yes, that’s right.
- And on both sides actually, I think the Chinese would have to be in some ways also a little bit lenient and understand how Germans do business, maybe.
- It seemed like it. They politely said that no, actually that’s not how we are going to do it, we are going to do it like this.
- Me: The Chinese?

- Ya. To me it seemed respectful. It was a misunderstanding, but...
- Yeah. But they would probably, if they were completely to anticipate how the Germans would probably do business, and they would be ready for that, and possibly that's when you have everyone understand.
- As I said before, I can't actually imagine this scenario occurring in the modern.., I think ten, fifteen years ago maybe, but not today.
- You'd hope not.
- You'd hope not... I mean you do get some muppets in charge of large amounts of money, but you'd hope for the most part in private enterprise would be a bit more savvy than that.
- Yes.
- I think the thing is as well that the Chinese have actually got the power in that situation because a lot of companies are wanting to get into the Chinese market. That could be a power play as well, by saying just hang on minute. Because the Germans are trying to push things through, so that's their way of saying we are the ones making decisions here.
- Me: Well, cool, thank you very much I think that was it. Thank you very much! Thanks for coming.