Breaking the Codes

– Working with Cross-cultural Groups

Inger Draeby

MiL

INSTITUTE

◆ A non-profit, independent foundation at the cross-roads between universities, corporations and society. Founded in Sweden in 1977.

◆ Professional programmes and projects for the development of leaders and management.

◆ Built on new perspectives on society and organisations, management and strategy, leadership and change.

◆ Based on a philosophy of learning and change developed within MiL – Action Reflection Learning, ARL.

◆ A network of well over 100 Member Companies and about 100 MiL Staff Professional Associates.

◆ A forum for sharing experiences, acquiring new experiences – and through reflective processes building new knowledge and competence.

MiL Concepts

MiL Concepts publishes articles and reports about the MiL way of working with change and development – theories and models as well as empirically based experiences.

Lennart Rohlin, dean and president of MiL Institute, is the editor of MiL Concepts. Gudrun Nilsson, network coordinator in MiL, is in charge of all administrative matters.

MiL Concepts primarily presents the philosophies, theories, viewpoints and empirical experiences of MiL Institute.

One copy of each edition of MiL Concepts is distributed free of charge to contact persons and subscribers at member companies and to the MiL Staff Professional Associates.

Foreword

This MiL Concept is an invitation to explore the creation of genuine encounters between business managers of different nationalities and cultures. The focal point is how to turn a meeting into an encounter. The immediate target group is international learning coaches whose task is to support managers in creating effective working relationships across cultural borders.
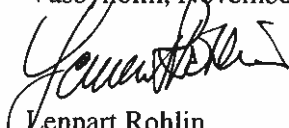
This group also includes international managers in their very important role as coaches; however, the context for the discussion is almost solely that of a development programme or a project that is designed not just as a task to be completed, but also as a learning opportunity. The immediate consequence of this focus is that the issue of power, which is ever-present in a business environment, is if not absent at least much less significant. The degree of personal risktaking associated with openness and honesty will most certainly be lower in the business context. A facilitator or manager working inside an organisation must respect people's needs for personal protection.

Inger Draeby is a MiL Senior Associate, facilitator in numerous MiL programmes, and member of the MiL Staff Network. She has been especially engaged in different international MiL programmes such as the partner programme Leadership in International Corporations (LINC) and several in-house programmes at Volvo. Inger holds a Ph.D. in litterature and has extensive work experience in international corporations, e.g. 3M. During 1998-99 she was the project leader of the MiL development project Going Global.

This paper was first presented at MiL's Research Seminars in October 1998 and Inger received a scholarship from the Management Research Foundation. The paper introduces the concept of culture as a behavioural code as a complementary perspective to Hofstede's concept of mental programming. It is followed through with several practical examples from different multicultural contexts.

The paper is based on the author's experience from working on the international arena for about ten years and an ongoing discussions with friends in the international training and business environment, not least with Bill Braddick, who has also been the linguistic advisor on the paper.

Vasbyholm, November 1999

Lennart Rohlin
MiL Institute

It is not that different - and yet

At the MiL Days 1996, I participated with Bill Braddick and Terry Lockhart in an Open Space discussion on the issue of working with crosscultural groups. We began by asking ourselves: Is building crossnational teams really different from building national teams? Must we as trainers and consultants do things differently? And if yes, what is it exactly that must be done – and how?

We arrived at the following conclusions:

1. All teams are complex systems that demand a multidimensional approach. Diversity emerges as a result of age, gender, experience, position, social and organisational background, and many other factors. National culture also forms a significant source of differences. So, this is an area that must be given attention – preferably at a very early stage in team building. People must be encouraged to talk about it, express themselves, wonder at others, ask questions, and clarify misunderstandings. This, however, goes for all diversity dimensions, so we conclude that crosscultural diversity does not demand any special approach.

2. In working teams (based on mutual dependency) personal differences are far more important than cultural traits, and therefore the methods we use to deal with personal differences are the most relevant.

3. This suggests that group dynamics are the same in (culturally) heterogeneous and homogeneous teams. This should be slightly modified: Halts in the working process of homogeneous teams are often a result of the tacit – but wrong – assumption "that we share the same context" which therefore does not need to be explored – whereas in heterogeneous teams, where people are aware of their being different, the group process can be slowed down because the members are afraid to hurt each other's feelings by confronting differences.

4. When dealing with working teams from the same organisation we have found that organisational culture is more important than national culture. This is due to the fact that the organisation holds the reward system that is immediately influencing each individual.

5. Our overriding conclusion, then, is: Always go back to "basics". Encourage the personal willingness to integrate diversity, and provide the necessary interpersonal skills. Make sure teams act on basis of a clear mutual contract.

I still agree with most of what we said then. However, it has occurred to me that there is a "complication" that we did not deal with in our discussion. This concerns the position of the facilitator, as a consultant or a manager.

A facilitator working with a crosscultural group is part of the game in a sense that is not found with monocultural, home country groups. In the home environment the facilitator can to some degree claim and practice neutrality because the language is owned equally by all parties (we know what we mean when we say...), and even subcultural codes are known also by non-members. But in a crosscultural context, he or she is inevitably biased: his or her perception and language are culturally determined. The facilitator is, in this respect, in the same situation as the group members, having to examine the meanings behind everything that is said or done, left without the security of the unspoken, self-obvious, shared cultural heritage.

It is my struggle with this insight that has been the driving force behind this paper. As a matter of fact, the most overwhelming experience from international exposure for me has been the realization that there exists no universal ground for value judgements. This realization has forced me to review and revise an assumption on which I used to base a good deal of my social identity: that my opinions were just simply right and valid – or at least that one right and valid opinion could be found. This revision is a mental reprogramming, and it is not merely an intellectual process, but

also highly emotional. It has shown me how cultural presumptions – in this case the Western notion of one absolute Truth – become an integral part of the personal sense of identity. And how hard they therefore are to overcome.

There are many other sources of diversity than national culture, and some readers may think that I exaggerate this specific aspect. But I believe that the national or ethnic cultural patterning that we are all subject to is the most powerful collective programming we experience next to that of gender roles, because it takes place from the moment we are born. Not only does culture create perceptive and emotional filters; but these remain unconscious until they become challenged by direct confrontation with other interpretations. In comparison, professional and organisational cultures are far more transparent in their origins, and it is also easier to recognize their relativity because we all experience a number of them in our daily life. This, of course, does not make them less important to deal with.

It is in human nature to relate

Any human society is based on communication; a society consists of relations created through communication. The communication process is always creating, maintaining or modifying relationships, whatever the content. "Being in relationships is a "standard feature" for human beings; it is not "optional equipment." Genetically and psychologically, human beings cannot not be in relationships with other people."[1]

The way human beings perceive themselves and others is constituted through communicative processes. In communication, differences and similarities are established, behavioural norms are set, the social reward system that guides behaviour is constituted. When a culture has a word for "father" and "mother", these words do not just refer to a biological process; they are learned in a social context that prescribes how children must relate to fathers and mothers. The word "I" has different meaning in different cultural contexts. It can be used with an understanding of the individual as merely representing the group: "I think...." means "We think...." – or it can be used to clearly distinguish the individual from the group: "I think...." means "I have a special viewpoint to offer...". What distinguishes multicultural from monocultural groups is that they apply different meaning to seemingly the same units or patterns of language.

The social constructionists have pinpointed the consequences of an interactional understanding of human beings: "Those who live in different cultures experience fundamentally different ways of being human because they engage in different forms of communication."[2]

I have found that it is easy to ask an American for his opinion about something; his concept of "I" is that of the individual as a meaningful societal unit, hence he (unconsciously) thinks that offering his particular ideas to a group is a basic act to make the group function and move. When a Japanese is asked the same question, he takes time to think, and he will come up with a description of the situation in general, its historical background and a range of possible scenarios for the future (that should be investigated by the group before a decision is made). What differentiates his response from that of the American in my ears is primarily the absence of a personal opinion statement. Now, the Japanese concept of "I" is embedded in the concept of "we"; the meaningful unit is more the group than the individual: it is the group that decides and causes movement, not the individual.

The good news is that "nature" is not involved. "Culture is learned, not inherited. It derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes."[3] Language is a human construct, hence it is possible to create (new) language between the members of a group, which is what crosscultural collaboration is essentially about.

Culture as a behavioural code

Hofstede talks about culture as mental programming. It "is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it was learned. It is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another."[4]

By nature, mental programming cannot be observed. Only behaviour can be observed. Hofstede's great achievement is that he has dared on a large scale to hypothesize about which mental programmes underly and direct observable behaviour.

I find it easier to use the concept "codes" when describing and working with cultural differences, because it singles out specific sets of behaviour, whereas a mental programme, as I understand Hofstede, comprises several behavioural codes. I also find the code concept useful because it denotes a context of joint social construction, whereas "mental programming" leaves open the question as to who is doing the programming. Codes are created by people for practical use, even when they are created unconsciously, i.e. without awareness of the creative process, which is commonly the case.

A cultural code is the result of communicative practice over time inside a community. It is the link between language and behaviour in that it establishes a steady connection between meaning and expression. Codes are the artefacts of people relating to each other through verbal and nonverbal language; through communication and its inherent reward-punishment system codes are "installed" in the mind. The earlier this happens in an individual's life, the less conscious it is. Therefore, company and other subcultural codes are more easy to access.

The mental programming consisting of a series of codes could also be called the cultural behavioural reward system. The main point is, people are not their cultural inheritance, they react according to it. Individuals are different and unique and never totally representative of a cultural norm or standard, but their systemic interactions are to a very high degree. Even if a Swedish individual is proud of his/her achievements and would like to talk about them, he/she would be cautious to do so because "bragging" would not be approved by the peer group. Likewise, a subordinate will respond to his superior in line with the code system connected to the local hierarchy, for instance by withholding skeptical comments.

I see culture – and not just national culture – as behavioural codes colouring the group interaction through the – largely unconscious – expectations that individuals hold with regard to the response they will get to their inputs, be it ideas, objections, approvals, suggestions.

A, an Italian male, and B, a Swedish female, coming from different companies, are members of a culturally mixed project group. Both are highly participative, both have at practically any time an opinion of or suggestion to what the group is or should be doing. During the group's existence, a pattern emerges between the two: when one of them is actively "on stage", the other keeps silent for a time, displaying doubt or disapproval through body language, then opposes verbally the idea that has been brought forward. This invariably brings the group to a standstill in its working on the common task.
On the facilitator's bringing the relation between the two into focus, A explains that he feels attacked by B without being able to understand why; B says she finds A dominating and incomprehensible. Tracing these judgments back to perceived behaviour, it appears that B is annoyed at A's way of talking: at length, in a loud voice, and with many repetitions. She, generally stating her points or ideas only once, does not feel like competing on this mode of communication, but takes to silence "until it gets too much", then always starts her sentences with "yes, but...", which in turn makes A feel put down.

The group could discover that A and B were acting based on different cultural codes. A from his home environment was used to have to always fight for getting heard, whereas B was used to a comparably high degree of collaboration around ideas, meaning that she at home would just have to drop a sentence in order for it to be taken into the group conversation. Where A was acting on a code like "your idea will only live if you can stay in charge", B's code was "your idea has the right to exist alongside all others, just like yourself". Having recognized these codings, both A and B were able to modify their behaviour, and to give each other feedback in a less hostile and more constructive way. This loosened the tension in the group and gave way to higher productivity and more well-reflected solutions.

The codes at work in this case may stem from national, company, or gender culture, or even from individual history. Or – even better – they are likely to stem from different sources in combination. However, this leads into a less interesting academic discussion; the point is how codes work.

Positioning, disagreement, and conflict/ confrontation are interactions that are strongly coded both nationally and companywise. They are affiliated to power, selfesteem, selfexpression, mutual connection, boundaries, in short with the essentials around how one experiences one's identity. While these issues are absolutely crucial components of a working group's life and development, they are also highly sensitive areas to approach.

In this context, I find that using the concept "codes" is helpful, because:

a) it puts everybody on the same level – it makes no sense to judge whether one code is more valuable than another – codes are practical measures and work as long as they are known by the people who live and work together, whereby they save a lot of time. When codes are not shared, they are useless.

b) it separates personality and mode of expression – again in a more "tangible" manner than "mental programming" allows. I must use some kind of code to express myself, but I am not the code I am using. I can learn to express myself differently if I find this beneficial. I can also in my own ongoing internal translation of the behaviours of others take their coding into account, so that I can listen and understand "behind the words".

c) it calls for the notion of a shared code - which is then to be created by the people in the group. In comparison, talking about mental reprogramming seems to be an endeavour beyond the power of a working group, even if it has a longterm assignment.

Decoding and recoding:
a joint construction venture

I have already made the point that crosscultural collaboration is essentially about creating a new, shared language. This is a process of several steps that in real life most often are intertwined:

1) To become aware of the existence of different codes
2) To identify where code differences occur in practice
3) To decode and recode behaviour.

Awareness of the existence of different codes

To start with national culture, Hofstede has provided the most extensive mapping of different codes[5], and I find it useful as a guideline to where differences might occur. One should never confound a map with reality; this is what stereotyping does. The point of cultural maps is not to ask the question about how other people "are", but to look for where they may respond to other codes than one's own. To a very high degree this is about critical selfawareness.

Nancy J. Adler, who is focussing on the practical implications of cultural differences, writes in a chapter about perception: "Although we may think that a major obstacle in conducting business around the world is in understanding foreigners, the greater difficulty involves becoming aware of our own cultural conditioning. As anthropologist Edward Hall explains, "What is known least well, and is therefore in the poorest position to be studied, is what is closest to oneself.""[6]

Kevin Barham and Stefan Wills have done an extensive interview study to identify what makes international managers succesful, and quote one of their interviewees: "Curiously, understanding other cultures does give people the opportunity to perceive themselves and their own country differently. I remember once trying to explain the British TV licence system to an American, with the detector vans, and all of a sudden it sounded as though I lived in a police state compared to the way it is in America. It does make you look at things differently. It makes you more tolerant of other people's beliefs and behaviours and I see this as a key point."[7]

From my own practice I have an example that shows how lack of awareness can produce - mildly speaking - unwanted results. It is wellknown that German and British science have different methodological preferences, the German being inclined to a deductive way of thinking, the British to an inductive. This is supposedly being transferred to and perpetuated by the entire educational system, thus becoming part of the general mental baggage of respectively German and British individuals. Hofstede connects this difference to the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, where Germans "score" considerably higher than Brits.

On an occasion I was cofacilitating a rather large group in an in-company session the aim of which it was to create a shared vision of the future of that particular division, including bridging acknowledged cultural differences. There were 6-7 different nationalities represented, the major groupings, however, being a German and a British contingent. After playing a little around with cultural stereotypes, which most people had fun of, we used a two-step process. The first step being to accumulate concrete experience with how things were working at the present stage, the second step consisting in formulating an overall vision, from which specific areas of action was to be developed. While in the first stage there was concern from the Germans if we really got to the bottom of things, in the second the Brits rebelled against being tied up by general principles.

We as facilitators, although ourselves of different nationalities (American, German, Danish), were unaware of the cultural implications of our choice of method, and we were unable to bridge the gap that occurred. This resulted in the emergence of very different stories told about that seminar, and I fear that we achieved the opposite of what we intended: that both Brits

and Germans had their prejudices about each other confirmed.

Other codes are related to occupational and company environments. It is wellknown that it takes some time before an individual entering an organisation becomes an effective contributor. Arne Vestergaard in an article on project management distinguishes between qualifications and competence, stating that: "Qualifications are general, i.e. not bound to any specific context, and they are supposed to follow their owner from task to task and from job to job. (...) While qualifications are evaluated and tested on the premises of the professional discipline, competence is evaluated by colleagues, peers, subordinates and customers, based on how useful in creating value for the company and its customers the person's capability is seen to be in the specific situation."[8]

The development of competence is based on a person's ability to understand and apply the codes of a specific context. Vestergaard uses the metaphor "dialect" for these codes.

When I with an academic background got employed in a sales company, I was disappointed by the fact that my boss would never read my carefully worked out papers on training and development initiatives. He just wanted me to give the headlines face to face. It took me quite some time to understand that this had less to do with him as a person than with the oral culture of the company. When I adjusted, communication between us improved substantially.

Identification of occurrence of code differences

As described in the example with the Italian and the Swede, it most often takes some time to discover code differences. It demands awareness of how patterns evolve in the group dynamics, and some hypothetizing as to what they are based upon. Again, code differences occur in any group, but the more mixed the group is, the greater the variety of codes.

In one international group I worked with, we identified through a very simple interview process ("How do you experience me as different from yourself?") a number of code differences that had influenced the group's progress:
- pride vs. guilt as motivator for action (I act in order to feel proud vs. I act in order to avoid bad conscience)
- interactive vs. directive decision-making
- strategic/holistic vs. operational/pragmatic approach to the task
- different degrees of international experience (assumption: the more experienced must be right, consequence: the less experienced did not speak up)
- different degrees of company experience (assumption and consequence as above).

Some of these differences we could trace back to national heritage, others we connected to occupational culture, the directive-pragmatic approach being taken by a manufacturing manager, and the interactive-holistic approach by managers from sales and marketing. Others again had to do with the company's culture.

My experience from working with nationally very mixed project groups is that there is resistance to view differences as culturally determined. People prefer to interpret differences as being of a personal kind, and they are obviously right in the sense that everything that happens is happening through interaction between real, unique human beings. Likewise, any change in the interaction pattern can only take place based on individual decisions.

To decode and recode behaviour

The decoding process is a metalinguistic act. We must talk about language (including both the verbal and the non-verbal), make language the subject of our interest. This means drawing the process of relating and communicating out of the semiautomatic, largely unconscious dynamic into open daylight. Decoding in itself comprises recoding: the creation of a shared code, namely the metacommunicative level. This is the level from where the meanings expressed in first order communication can be investigated, analyzed, and relativized. Moving to this second order

communication is a prerequisite for avoiding a win-lose situation between different viewpoints of what is meaningful, like the situation described with the Brits and the Germans.

Methodologically, these processes do not differ from the techniques used when establishing understanding and resolving conflicts in a monocultural context. What is required, are basic interactive skills like active listening, questioning one's own assumptions and creating a shared picture. Visualisations like drawings, models, etc. have proven to be very helpful means.

In MiL programmes, we use reflective dialogue as a form of free exchange of thoughts where it is not allowed to argue. This process contains important elements of the decoding/recoding process. Every individual is given the opportunity to express her/himself spontaneously, and as contributions accumulate the richness and variety of reactions and thinking become obvious. The rule of "no arguing and contradiction" encourages listening and containment of the diversity while discouraging reductionism; what often happens is that people take ideas from one another and build on them, thus interpreting them according to their own line of thought. This interpretation made in the forum of the programme group enhances the mutual understanding as it is in itself an act of creating a shared code. It has impressed me that until now I have not met one single individual from any one culture who has not learn- ed to appreciate this way of communi- cating and relating, even though it is unfamiliar in a business environment. This to me is a very practical confir- mation of the constructionist view: that relating is generically human.

Recoding can also take the form of set- ting ground rules for how the group shall relate internally and externally. This is communicating on the communication process. But even in this process there may be pitfalls.

Having taken a MiL programme group through a process of setting general ground rules, I was asked by an Italian: "But what does "rules" mean? Do we get punished, if we don't follow them?"

That was a very direct feedback revealing my cultural bias, that I then (fortunately) got the opportunity to explain. "Rules" are by Danes experienced as guidelines, not as laws (cf. the popular saying "No rule without exception". If rules are agreed upon in common, however, each individual has a moral obligation to follow them. The Protestant-democratic implications of this concept are obvious, only it took a Catholic to make me aware of it.

Another pitfall I experienced when I was trying to use my normal way of making mutual contracting in a project group that contained both Westerners and Easterners. What I usually do – and had so far believed would work universally – is to ask each group member to state some wants and needs connected to the process they are embarking on, and based on this information have the group negotiate a working contract. Now, with an Easterner on board, this did not work – as illustrated in my first example with the Japanese and the American. It seems to be necessary in these cases to take a contextual approach as the first step: to create a shared picture of the task and its meaning – before getting to individual commitments.

The process of recoding is in principle a process of relating in an entirely new way, in that the relating medium – the language – is consciously constructed on the spot by the community where it must work. It is at the same time a process of bonding on the emotional level.

In the recoding also lies the opportunity for qualitative leaps in idea generation. New ideas may emerge out of new words, or old ideas may be transformed and given new life. A recent example I heard from Seth Selleck, who is one of the initiators of the global youth magazine Cultural Horizons, launched 1998. In a brainstorm about a name for the endeavours of those engaged in the project, somebody came up with "Friendification". As a good British friend of mine put it "this is definitely not an English word" - no, it is a creative story by and of a global community, be this ever so fragile.

"National alliances"

The national cultural coding seems to work most strongly where a mixed group contains two or more individuals of the same national origin. I have often observed how these – despite big differences in personality and job responsibility, even working for different companies – have "found each other" very easily and been able to influence the group process considerably in the forming and norming stages. This has happened even when these individuals were not working in their own language (although they have also in their mutual bonding taken recurrence to smalltalk in their mother tongue, thereby excluding the other group members).

What seems to be the case is that people of the same nationality share such a broad frame of reference (= have so many codes in common) that they need to negotiate very little in order to understand one another, thereby getting an advantage over group members who are "on their own". As the group matures, these alliances tend to dissolve; however, for the benefit of both task and group, it is advisable to create awareness of this phenomenon at an early stage.

Linguistic barriers

English is the dominant language in international work. This puts people with English or American mothertongue and people from linguistically (and culturally) related areas – like Scandinavia – in a one-up position. It is difficult for these people to really acknowledge the difficulties others have in expressing themselves. And in a verbal culture – such as the management culture – linguistic incapacity is easily mistaken for a lack of intellectual development. People with fewer English skills, forced to use relatively primitive semantics and syntax, are therefore more easily neglected in meetings. As a result, their effort to contribute is not valued. This, in turn, often has very negative consequences for their motivation.

Working in an unfamiliar language deprives one of spontaneity and causes quite a lot of frustration because relating to others becomes difficult. "Despite the fact that he (an expatriate manager) has a good technical grasp of the language, his integration into the culture does not yet feel complete. It's almost as if the effort required to find the right words requires that he detach himself from his emotions. In this situation, the first concern has to be to get the words right, so the emotional or human part of the self is unconsciously suppressed, leaving a feeling of emptiness."[9]

It is worth a thought what this means to crossnational teams that must perform together: the mind is split into two parts, one being concerned with linear thinking (to get the words right), the other containing the emotions about the situation as a whole – the other people, the task, the expectations from others and self – including the struggle with the language. How much "free energy" is left to concentrate on the task?

Working across linguistic barriers simply takes more time. Those most familiar with the language spoken (assumedly English) can make a real contribution by supporting the others in expressing themselves more fully. This goes from suggesting and explaining specific words to making probing extensions of simple statements put forward by a non-English speaker, like: "When you say you had a crisis, do you mean that you were put in a dilemma without support from your superiors?"

Psychological preparedness

I have already touched on the point that the most important aspect of cultural awareness is self-awareness. Barham and Wills have taken this point further in their investigation of the competences of effective international managers, in that they have not just identified a set of interactional skills needed but also hypothesized about the psychological build-up that lies behind and holds together these skills. They call this "being" and distinguish three dimensions: cognitive complexity, emotional energy, and psychological maturity. Although I find this differentiation problematic, as it seems to separate mutually dependent phenomena, the authors highlight in my opinion very precisely some of the major challenges that bridging cultural differences present to the individual.

On the intellectual level: "Essentially, (complex thinking as correlating with higher levels of managerial performance) comprises two primary components: differentiation and integration. Differentiation is the ability to perceive several dimensions in a situation rather than only one. Its success is often dependent upon being able to move from one frame of reference to another to explore a situation fully. Integration is the ability to identify relationships and patterns among the different dimensions and to make new and creative links between them."[10]

This intellectual capability is closely tied to what Barham and Wills call emotional resilience: "...the facility to open oneself emotionally and deal with uncomfortable or stressful situations without overreacting to them in a way which hinders a person's capability to handle and overcome them."[11]

Connected to emotional resilience is risk acceptance:

"The act of putting oneself in potentially uncomfortable or stressful situations clearly involves a certain amount of risk. Such risks become pertinent to the emotional self especially when they are taken in interpersonal situations where the person's self-esteem is involved."[12]

The capability that results from the combination of emotional resilience and complex thinking is what many psychologists call containment, which is described by the authors as follows: "a holding or bracketing of one's assumptions in order to open oneself completely to the perspectives of the other. When considering the size of the mental "baggage" which we all carry around and the vigour with which we usually protect and promote it, this is not a simple task."[13]

Containment does not mean that a person extinguishes or suppresses his or her own preferences, but that he or she is able to hold these while truly experiencing those of others, and participate in a dialogue where differences can be talked about and investigated, so that a shared language can be created.

The implications of this is that the ability to participate in and (co)create genuine crosscultural encounters is a matter of personal development and maturity. It demands the ability to be objective about one's own mental and emotional patterning, which for most people is a project of lifelong learning. However, the exposure to foreign cultures is in itself a driver for this development. Meeting with other cultures can result in glimpses of oure hitherto unconscious "mental baggage" and make us aware that there are more than one way to experience the world.

The position of the facilitator

The facilitator of a group functions – for good or bad – as a role model, and the way he or she approaches diversity will be taken as "the state of art", at least in the context of a development programme, where the training staff provides the structuring leadership.

In MiL programmes, a very important aspect of the facilitator's role is that of securing feedback on the group process. It goes without saying that a feedback is never objective. It will always be coloured by the individual who is giving it, first and foremost mirroring his or her own perceptual, emotional and intellectual, hence also cultural filters.

How a facilitator deals with his or her own cultural as well as personal etc. bias is a crucial question. The point is not so much what he or she is saying about cultural diversity; the point is the attitude that is metacommunicated through action. If the facilitator can display a high degree of containment capability, this will influence the group much stronger than any verbal messages about tolerance. What has been said about psychological preparedness is not limited to international managers; it is the prerequisite for succesful facilitation as well.

[1] Barnett Pearce, p.203

[2] Ibid., p.202

[3] Hofstede, p.5

[4] Ibid.

[5] A useful supplement to Hofstede's dimensions can be found in Hall & Hall, above all in their pointing to different perceptions of *time* and *space*.

[6] Adler, p. 80

[7] Barham and Wills, Management across Frontiers, p.59

[8] Vestergaard, p.155f, my translation

[9] Barham and Wills: Being an International Manager, p.4

[10] Barham and Wills, Management..., p.53

[11] Barham and Wills, Being..., p.5

[12] Barham and Wills, Management..., p.66

[13] Barham and Wills, Being..., p.2, my emphasis

References:

Nancy J. Adler: *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior*, South-Western College Publishing, 1997.

K. Barham & S.Wills: *Management across Frontiers - Identifying the competences of succesful international managers*, Ashridge Management Research Group, without year.

K. Barham & S. Wills: Being an international manager in: *International Executive Programmes*, ed. Philip Sadler, 3rd. Edition, Kogan Page, 1998.

W. Barnett Pearce: *Interpersonal Communication: Making Social Worlds*, HarperCollins CollegePublishers, 1994.

Geert Hofstede: *Cultures and Organisations*, HarperCollinsBusiness, 1991.

Edward T. Hall &
Mildred Reed Hall: *Understanding Cultural Differences*, Intercultural Press, 1989.

Arne Vestergaard: Kompetenceudvikling med projektgrupper som eksempel in: *Erhvervspsykologi i praksis*, ed. Haslebo & Nielsen, Dansk Psykologisk Forlag, 1998.

MiL Concepts

1/1996   Lennart Rohlin et. al.:
**What do we mean by
Action Reflection Learning®
and other short articles**

2/1996   Lars Cederholm and Thomas Sewerin:
**Out of the Box
– MiL Partner Programme in New York City**

3/1996   Lennart Rohlin:
Project Work in MiL

4/1997   Thomas Sewerin:
The MiL Learning Coach

5/1998   Lars Cederholm:
Ghosts in Organizations

6/1998   Roger Poulet:
Designing effective development programmes

7/1999   Lennart Rohlin:
**MiL Institute
– Concepts and Programmes 1999**

8/1999   Michael Brent and Jonathan Matheny
**Self Reflection – The Source of Personal
and Leadership Development**

9/1999   Inger Draeby
**Breaking the Codes
– Working with Cross-culturalGroups**

MiL

INSTITUTE

MiL Institute is a network for value-based and business driven management development, exchanging of experiences and the realisation of visions. Within this network of well over 100 member companies, and a staff of 100 professional associates, MiL Institute designs and conducts qualified programmes to prepare managers for present and future strategic challenges.

There is a great variety of programmes; open, partner, in-company and international. Action Reflection Learning (ARL) is our learning philosophy, an effective approach for the development of management and successful leadership, and also to create new, tailor-made programmes in cooperation with the companies.