Can multicultural human resources management problems be solved by an organisational culture?

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Article abstract

During recent decades, globalisation has affected and changed functions of enterprises, firms must adapt their strategies to global business and to international human resources management. A new challenge seems to be imposed to international managers and to international HRM: how to create cooperation between employees representing different cultural backgrounds and how to find a common identity in multicultural teams? Our article, based on a case study, inter-site cases, examines five different multicultural work groups. Results reveal how cooperation can be created and managed with the HRM practices and tools: recruitment, intercultural management, mediation and organisational culture.

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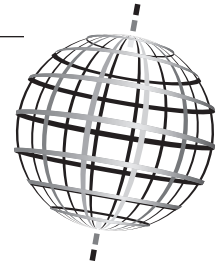
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Résumé

Pendant les dernières décennies, la mondialisation a affecté et changé les fonctions dans les entreprises. Celles-ci doivent adapter leurs stratégies au marché international et au management international des ressources humaines. Un nouveau défi semble s'imposer aux managers internationaux et au management des ressources humaines internationales : à savoir comment créer de la coopération entre les employés issus de cultures différentes et comment construire une identité commune dans les équipes multiculturelles ? Notre article, fondé sur une étude de cas inter-sites, examine cinq équipes de travail multiculturelles. Les résultats montrent comment on peut obtenir de la coopération et la gérer avec les pratiques et outils de management des ressources humaines : recrutement, management interculturel, médiation et culture d'entreprise.

Mots clés : Management des ressources humaines, management multiculturel, différences culturelles, pratiques managériales, coopération

Abstract

During recent decades, globalisation has affected and changed functions of enterprises, firms must adapt their strategies to global business and to international human resources management. A new challenge seems to be imposed to international managers and to international HRM: how to create cooperation between employees representing different cultural backgrounds and how to find a common identity in multicultural teams? Our article, based on a case study, inter-site cases, examines five different multicultural work groups. Results reveal how cooperation can be created and managed with the HRM practices and tools: recruitment, intercultural management, mediation and organisational culture.

Keywords: Human Resources Management, Multicultural Management, Cultural Differences, Management practices, Cooperation

Resumen

Durante las últimas décadas, la mundialización ha afectado y cambiado las funciones de las empresas. Estas tienen que adaptar sus estrategias al mercado internacional y a la gestión internacional de los recursos humanos. Un nuevo desafío parece imponerse a los directivos

Internacionales y a la gestión de los recursos humanos (RRHH) internacionales, a saber: cómo crear cooperación entre los empleados que representan culturas diferentes y cómo construir una identidad común en los equipos multiculturales. Nuestro artículo, fundado en el estudio de un caso inter-agencias, examina cinco equipos de trabajo multiculturales. Los resultados muestran cómo se puede obtener cooperación y administrarla con prácticas y herramientas de gestión de los recursos humanos: reclutamiento, gestión de la multiculturalidad, mediación y cultura empresarial

Palabras claves: Gestión de los Recursos Humanos, gestión de la multiculturalidad, diferencias culturales, prácticas de gestión, cooperación

During recent decades, globalisation has affected and changed functions of enterprises, firms must adapt their strategies to global business, to global production and to international human resources management (HRM). Global human resources management means learning and integration in multicultural teams for employees. In addition managers must learn how to manage cultural differences and diversity in teams and coordinate their work. In practice, diversity refers to gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, tenure, educational background, and functional background (Milliken and Martins, 1996; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). Questions concerning multicultural human resources management and managerial practices can occur at several levels: firstly, how to create cooperation between cultures? Secondly, how to create a common identity in teams? Thirdly, what is the manager's role and the role of HRM in this process?

The literature on the management of cultural differences shows that over the past thirty years cultural factors seem to be more of a problem than an advantage in international firms. These factors are often associated with conflicts, misunderstandings and low performance in organisations (Bivens and Lowell, 1966; Killing, 1983; Shenkar and Zeira, 1992). Culturally diverse work groups have a higher level of conflict (Pelled, 1996), and less cooperation and cohesiveness (Jehn, Northcraft and Neale, 1999), and an inability to define common goals and aspirations (O'Reilly, Snyder and Boothe, 1993). Dass and Parker (1999) state that there is no best way to manage workforce diversity in organisations. Other studies explore cultural factors as an advantage in a business environment, on the condition that they are well managed (Thatcher and Jehn, 1998; Chevrier, 2000; Barmeyer and Mayrhofer, 2002; Van Knippenberg, De Dreu and Homan, 2004). A new approach has emerged recently in the works of d'Iribarne (2004) and of Chanlat (1995, 2005), who stress the impact of anthropology in understanding cultural complexity while managing multicultural workforces.

Our article, based on a case study, examines the cooperation and the functioning of five multicultural work groups.

It offers an example of managerial practices that are successfully adapted and integrated in a multicultural organisation. The empirical research data has been collected in an international firm called "Prometheus"[1] established in 100 countries worldwide. In the first part of the study, the article will present the conceptual foundations and research methodology, followed by the presentation of the company. The second part of the study will then examine the managerial practices and the management tools put in place for cooperation. The final part of the article will discuss results and the limitations of the study.

Conceptual foundations and research methodology

Our primary interest in this study was to understand how to manage multicultural work groups in international organisations. The research, based on the difficulty of people representing different cultures have in working together (Chevrier, 2000) is a new addition to the literature because previous authors in the domain of intercultural management (those representing comparative or international management) have all avoided questions of intercultural cooperation. Their first concern has been to know if diversity is an enriching source or a constraint for an organisation. Instead of being interested in the content of the problem (how to create synergy between cultures?), most researchers have concentrated on the consequences of the phenomenon (a real and inevitable constraint or an opportunity)[2]. Nevertheless, the difficulties in managing cultural differences can be examined from three perspectives: 1) the concept of culture; 2) the concept of cultural identity and 3) the concept of cooperation.

Conceptual foundations

In order to manage multicultural workforce it is necessary to recognise cultural differences. By cultural differences we mean the variable "national culture[3]" and justify our choice for using the term "multicultural" by a juxtaposition of cultures (Demorgon, 2002). We think that understanding cultural differences includes two pertinent notions: *culture* (as seen by anthropologists) and *cultural identity*[4]. Several psychologists working in the field of intercultural studies distinguish cultural identity as a component of individual identity in addition to personal and social identity (Guerraoui and Troadec, 2000). As social beings, individuals construct their identity inside the cultural and social environment where they inhabit. Interaction theory (Camillieri and Vinsonneau, 1996; Denoux, 1994) argues that individuals modify their pre-structured cultural environment through active and interactive constructions while influenced by other members of their group.

The notion of an individual has been described by Parsons (1937) and Crozier and Friedberg (1977). An individual has a *culture* of origin (or several cultures, for example in the case of parents representing two different cultures); this culture (these cultures) is (are) part of the individual's *cultural identity*. According to Denoux (1994), cultural identity can be seen as a kind of metamorphosis identity that is very adaptable. When promoting *cooperation* (the construction of a common action) between individuals representing different cultures, it is necessary to identify different cultural identities participating in a particular interaction, (a contextually identified action). Since Harris and Moran (1979), researchers have sought to model cooperation in multicultural organisations. Different studies, among them Adler (1983; 1986) proposes a model of management underlining the understanding and respect between different cultures (based on recognition of different cultural identities).

In addition to these models, often based on cultural, psychosociological[5] or organisational approaches, proposed in management literature, the concept of cooperation can be seen in the theories of Boltanski and Thévenot (Convention theory, 1987), and Callon and Latour (Actor-Network theory, 1978). These theories propose a new understanding for the social construction of collective action through a "common agreement" or "compromise" which is then maintained by a network through "translators" and "spokespersons". In this sense, cooperation is seen as a social collective action, it can also be connected to the notion of the *organisational culture* (Schein, 1992).

In order to examine the management of multicultural human resources in international firms, we observed five multicultural teams in an enterprise called Prometheus.

Research methodology

An exploratory research method was chosen in order to study five multicultural teams in three different agencies of Prometheus (Brussels, Luxembourg and Paris). Three aspects were studied using interviews in order to understand team functioning and management: 1) interaction functions in multicultural teams; 2) the manager's role in these teams; 3) the role of the variable culture in cooperation. The last question was studied from two perspectives: a) perception of multicultural factors between employees; b) employees implication in a multicultural working environment. These

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1. The real name of the company will not be revealed in order to preserve confidentiality.

2. Reference based on the author's Ph.D.

3. As defined by D'Iribarne, in his works. See also Pesqueux (2004), p. 1-9.

4. See Sparrow, L. (2000). The author outlines in her study the importance of national culture when constructing an individual identity.

5. Amongst these studies, for example, Granrose and Oskamp (1997).

perspectives were chosen in order to understand the difference between perception (which reflects individuals' attitudes or their representations of the "Other") and implication (which explains the effects and consequences for these attitudes).

and commodities and energy markets around the world. The firm was created by its British founder in London in the 19th century, today it consists of more than 200 agencies in 130 countries. These agencies employ around 15 000 members representing 123 nationalities and working in 19 languages.

Research methodology

Our research methodology was based on an empirical approach close to ethnosociology (Chanlat, 2006). This approach directly contacts individuals and groups in the field by translating and analysing their perspectives, perceptions and interpretation of the surrounding environment. This is why we chose face-to-face interviews as an approach to meet individuals in their working places in order to understand the complexity of the multicultural environment. Our data was collected in Prometheus between May-October 2005 and includes 25 interviews (or 30 pages of actor testimony). These interviews were semi-directive and based on a "theme-question" guide prepared in advance. The individual interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour each.

The themes concerned as follows (in multicultural teams):

(1) Working conditions in teams and the manager's role in a team;

(2) Perception of multicultural factor in teams;

(3) Exchanges and types of communication;

(4) Conflicts or misunderstandings based on different cultural models that can endanger or prevent cooperation in teams;

(5) Employees' implication in a multicultural working environment.

Another guide for interviews was introduced while meeting three international HRM Directors. This guide contained four categories of questions: (1) questions on human resources management; (2) questions on work organisation; (3) the multicultural aspect in interactions between employees; and (4) international HRM policy.

The data has been analysed afterwards with the method from Miles and Huberman, inter-site cases (2003, p. 307-518).

The interviews were conducted in the Prometheus agencies in Brussels, Luxembourg and Paris and included employees representing 10 different nationalities (Algerian, American, Belgian, British, Dutch, German, French, Greek, Italian and Luxembourg natives). Three interntional HRM Directors were also interviewed in London, Paris and in Luxembourg. The aim of these interviews was to understand the role of the HRM Directors on the organisational level of the company.

In order to obtain good data, interviews with employees were carefully planned in advance with the support of the company management. The employees were able to participate in inquiry on a voluntary basis. Each employee was interviewed alone, not in group, so that he (she) could express himself (herself) freely without being influenced by the group. The interviews were organised inside each agency in question in order to respect the social and cultural proximity of the working environment. The employees who wished to participate in our research work were also told about the purpose of the inquiry.

Presentation of the case study

Prometheus is a global information company providing information for the financial services, media and corporate markets. It is best known as one of the world's largest international multimedia news agencies. However more than 90% of its revenues derive from financial products including equities, fixed income, foreign exchange, term deposits

The multicultural workforce represents professions such as journalists, engineers and commercial professionals that work mainly in multicultural teams (except journalists[6]). The engineers are specialists in technical solutions and in software installation; commercial professionals work as generalists or specialists with knowledge of risk management/solutions, treasury, asset management, invest-

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6. We have not included journalists in our study, only employees that work in teams.

ment banking and brokerage. Multicultural teams can be "traditional" work groups based permanently in agencies or virtual teams working in separate countries that are inter-connected by telecommunications (Favier and Coat, 2002; Favier, 2005).

The stable situation between employees and their different cultures can be explained by the fact that the group size is limited; besides that they are few persons, they all represent different cultures (American, Luxembourg, Belgian Flemish and French) – *"There is no pressure between*

Presentation of multicultural work groups (Table 1)

Five multicultural work groups were observed: two multicultural groups in Luxembourg and one in Brussels (T1, T2 & T5) including the following teams:

- *Sales Group* – composed of commercial professionals;
- *Client Training Group* – composed of engineers and professional specialists in client training;
- PSG (*Professional Service Group*) – composed of 15 engineers often working outside of Prometheus within client firms.

Extending the study on the European level, two virtual teams were included (T3 and T4).

T3 operates in 8 different countries – Luxembourg, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece. This team is composed of commercial professionals specialising in risk management and is managed by a Belgian Sales Manager from his Luxembourg agency. The Manager drafts plans and coordinates the work for 20 employees representing 7 different nationalities (Spain and Portugal are represented by two Spanish employees). Another virtual team also working at the European level was selected. This group (T4) is composed of 40 commercial professionals specialising in marketing. Four employees of this group were interviewed representing three different nationalities: Algerian, French-American and two French employees, one of whom was the Manager of this virtual team. This group was based in Paris.

The company has been chosen for the study because of its long tradition in international HRM – it opened its first office in London back in the 19th century. Moreover, the five permanent teams studied present different characteristics based on team composition, functioning and management. The interpersonal cooperation construction varies also inside teams: in T1 members interact permanently; in T2 and T5 interactions are not permanent but frequent because members still share the same open space office; and finally T3 and T4 work together virtually on a daily basis.

Interactions between individuals in a multicultural work group

Case study 1 – "traditional team"

Three work groups (T1, T2 and T5) can be characterised as "traditional" work groups comparing to the two virtual groups (T3 and T4). These "traditional" work groups are based in local agencies in Luxembourg and Brussels. The first group (T1) differentiates itself from the others because it is the only permanently based group where all employees work together with their team supervisor. Their permanent working situation seems to be favourable in creating interactions between employees, in developing exchanges and facilitating the circulation of information, being both formal and informal communication in group. The cohesion of the group remains also outside working hours: *"We go out together even after work* […]", (Mr Jackson, team supervisor, American nationality); *"We do some sports together during lunch hour",* (Mr Heintz, account manager, native from Luxembourg).

cultures, the team is very balanced, I think it is due to our small team. We spend lot of time together at work but also outside work. For example, my colleagues came to my marriage. Things have changed a little lately, because I'm now the team supervisor, sometimes my colleagues seem to be more distant", (the American team supervisor). The small number of team members facilitates the unity in this group and prevents members from the same nationality from getting together (as is the case in bigger groups). *"Our communication is permanent, more informal than formal. We are often together between team members,"* (Mr Heintz, Luxembourg). In this kind of small group, the spatial, social and cultural proximity helps to create certain common motivations, emotions and values: *"I think it is very positive to work in a multicultural environment. We have no pressure between cultures.* (Mr Kirk, account manager, Belgian Flemish nationality).

TABLE 1

Presentation of five multicultural teams interviewed in Prometheus

Team	Localisation	Male	Female	Age	Nationality	Profession	Years in firm	Data Collected (in hours)
Team 1	Luxembourg	3	0	25-40	American Belgian (Flemish) Luxembourg	Commercial professionals generalists	4,5-9 years	Interviews 2 x 30 min 1 x 1 h
Team 2	Luxembourg	1+1	0	20-30	Belgian (French-speaking) French	PSG + Client Training	1-7,5 years	Interviews 2 x 1 h
Team 3	Virtual team in Europe	8	4	35-50	Belgian (Flemish/ French-speaking) French Greek Italian Luxembourg Dutch	Commercial professionals specialists	2-11 years	Interviews 1 x 2 h 4 x 30 min 7 x 1 h
Team 4	Virtual team in Europe	4	0	35-50	Algerian American French	Commercial professionals marketing	2-20 years	Interviews 4 x 1 h
Team 5	Brussels	1	0	35-40	German	PSG	6 years	1 x 1 h
HRM	Luxembourg Paris London	2	1	45-55	British French	Directors	15-25 years	1 x 6 h (contact person Luxembourg) 1 x 2 h (Paris) 1 x 1 h (London)
TOTAL		**20**	**5**	**25-55**	**10 nationalities**			**29 hours**

Case study 2 – engineers

The other two groups (T2 and T5) present quite a different situation compared to the first group. These groups are composed of engineers, who are mobile, most of the time working in client firms and are less present in their local agency. Due to this working situation, the interactions between employees are more limited. Another reason seems to limit interactions between engineers and this can be associated to the profession culture of engineers: *"Communication is very formal between engineers, because they are between men"*, (Mr Martin, team supervisor, French nationality). It seems indeed that engineers are less "talkative" by nature and prefer to communicate by indirect methods (mails, mobile phones). These two groups are also larger in terms of number of employees. This allows employees of the same nationality to get together: *"The employees of Luxembourg nationality like forming clans and they talk in a Luxembourg dialect. The same language unites them,"* (Mr Martin). In spite of this working environment, strong social links can be observed (meetings after working hours or during lunch time).

I like working in this environment. I want to meet other cultures than only mine. But I think that a common language is not enough to bring together different cultures. It is a question of openness – our firm is very international. Naturally, employees' social and cultural background plays an important role in their openness – here the system engineers have stereotypes that belong to their profession (Mr Martin, Luxembourg).

As in the case of the first group, cultural differences seem to be balanced. Differences between engineers are more due to their profession than to different nationalities present in groups: *"Between engineers, there are cultural differences linked to their profession. Some engineers graduated from the most famous schools consider themselves as the elite in the profession and create segregation in a group,"* (Mr Saussure, Marketing Manager, French nationality, Paris)[7].

Case study 3 – virtual teams

Compared to the "traditional" work groups the virtual work groups (T3 and T4) are not only more complex in their functioning but also in their interactions. We are facing problems associated with working conditions in virtual teams, such as the problem of trust related to the distance between employees (Favier, 2005; Maznevski, Davison and Barmeyer, 2005; Kezsbom, 2000; Järvenpää, Knoll and Leidner, 1998; Handy, 1995). Employees working far away from their collaborators and meeting each other rarely lack socialisation and cannot develop mutual trust like employees working together on a daily basis: *"We have a problem of proximity; we seldom meet people with whom we work"*. *Distance between people creates problems when they are of different origins. For example, understanding is difficult between French and English nationals. How can you know that an Englishman never says no, his yes can mean no. It is easier to understand him when you face him."* (Mr Chesneau, the French team supervisor for commercial professionals, Paris); *"We would like to meet our colleagues to get to know each other"*, *because our discussions on phone are of purely "academic" interest"*, (Mr Saussure). In spite of efficient means of wireless communications (internet, mobile phones, teleconferences) that connect employees daily (*"We communicate essentially through mails or teleconferences – our communication is 80% non verbal"*, (Mrs Morin, team supervisor, Brussels), these employees suffer from physical distance from their collaborators. Obviously, the best technology cannot always replace the human presence in working relationships.

In the case of virtual teams, the variable culture can create more problems than in other teams[8]: According to the team supervisor, face-to-face situations are necessary sometimes to understand colleagues from different cul-

tures. We need though to specify that the variable culture seems to create more problems in the case of team 4 based in the Paris agency than in the case of team 3 based in Luxembourg (where it is hardly expressed by the employees). In our analysis, we understand that this situation depends on the group management and on the personalities of the managing directors.

The role of the team manager

In traditional team management, team supervisors or team managers are present in their teams supervising the work of their collaborators. In the case of Prometheus, the team management varies from "proximity" management to IT management depending on teams and their leaders.

In the case of the first team (T1), the team is managed by the Belgian Sales Manager who is also in charge of virtual team 3. In practice, this double management situation means that the manager associates his team supervisor in managing team 1, but he manages team 3 by "remote management". In this kind of participative management, the team supervisor coordinates the work for the employees but does not have any decision making power in team organisation. In respect of mobile teams T2 and T5, the team management is based on common objectives and results controlled by the means of a Balanced Score Card. In these teams, the supervisors also work at distance from their collaborators who often work in the field in other companies. In virtual teams T3 and T4, team management can be characterised as distant: *"I can't control at distance. I trust my collaborators; they are independent in their teams"* (Mr Jacob, Sales manager, Belgian French nationality). In team 3 particularly, the manager tries to be the main link between his team members: *"I travel all the time, I try to meet everybody individually at least once a month in Europe."* In contrast to this type of participative management practiced by Mr Jacob in Luxembourg, Mr Saussure, the Marketing Manager of virtual team 4 in Paris, works with wireless communications: *"In our firm, we are used to communicating essentially by mail"*. Mr Saussure explains also that he would like to go more in the field to meet his collaborators to know them better but he has no time for it: *"The first contact between collaborators is always in the field…We would like to meet our colleagues to get to know each other"*, *because our discussions on phone are of purely "academic" interest"*. This difference between these two types of team management could be explained by the personality of the manager and by their leadership styles (Mintzberg, 1995). According to Mintzberg, we could describe the leadership of Mr Jacob as "personal management". This manager tries to be a kind of mentor to his employees (looking for a very close relation-

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7. In her study, Chevrier (2000, p. 80-81) also points out that engineers are only interested in technical matters in enterprise and prefer to ignore other administrative or commercial aspects.

8. Including language problems. See Geoffroy (2001) on this point and especially on "linguocentrism".

TABLE 2

Multicultural work group interactions and team management

Teams	Team management	Exchanges	Conflicts	Perception of multicultural work environment	Consequences
Team 1	Participative team management and the proximity of the team manager	Team cohesion and stable team work	Minor conflicts or none	Favourable perception of diversity; Favourable recognition of others	Facility in integration; Recognition of others; Overall satisfaction and motivation
Teams 2 and 5	Remote management by supervising managers	Mobile employees/ engineers working in the field	Many absences from office and less meetings between colleagues		
Team 3	Remote and participative team management	Social relationship characterised by distance	Yes, but these can be managed and they do not disturb cooperation		
Team 4	Remote management via IT solutions	Social relationship characterised by distance and distant manager; sometimes difficult exchanges	Yes, but can be managed	Favourable general perception of diversity but more difficulties in intercultural communication; more stereotypes in intercultural relationships	

ship with each of them) whereas the leadership of Mr Saussure is more like "controlling employees by information".

Table 2 shows that after analysing the first interviews, a low impact of the variable culture in teams was noted. Very few conflict situations were mentioned and they were rather characterised by employees « misunderstandings » rather than conflicts. The general perception of the "Other", the colleague, was favourable and the employees were satisfied with their multicultural environment. The team 4 shows though an exception to these conclusions: characterised by a distant IT manager, the team members stress more intercultural communication problems and face others with a more stereotyped attitude. In general, the situation can be characterised as favourable for cooperation in the company. The second analysis of the interviews explains how the variable culture is managed by Prometheus' global human resources management to maintain the favourable situation for cooperation in multicultural teams.

Managerial practices and the management tools for cooperation

In Prometheus, the policies for team management and managerial practices are regulated by the global HRM Directors in London (Europe) and in New York. The interviews state the HRM implication in the firm at different levels: (1) working conditions (arranging specific working hours and workplaces); (2) multicultural human resources management (recruitment, training/coaching, conflict management; and (3) implementing a common organisational culture.

THE ORGANISATION OF WORK OR THE POLICY OF "SMART WORKING"

We have developed in our organisation special working conditions called "smart working". "Smart working" means working in an "open space". This policy was conceived to facilitate cooperation between professions which now share the same working place and environment. Commercial teams and client training teams share the same space. We also wanted to mix competences in the multicultural environment. To achieve our policy goal we had to move to another building where we could adapt available space for our needs, (Mrs Wagner, Human Resources Director from Luxembourg, of French nationality).

"Smart working" gives staff the freedom, through flexible workplaces and technology solutions, to work with whomever they need to work with, in a place that supports the type of work being carried out at a time that is conve-

nient to those engaged in the work[9]. "Smart working" allows individuals to decide the best way to achieve personal, team and company objectives by taking responsibility for their output and managing their own work/life balance. By allowing individuals more flexible use of office space[10], by achieving better occupancy through desk-sharing, the multicultural workforce can work better together. This detail is particularly important when concerning employees that work in virtual teams; they are permanently separated from their colleagues. As we observed in different agencies, they can work together with other local employees.

RECRUITMENT, INTERCULTURAL TRAINING/COACHING AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The HR management has adapted different managerial practices, recruitment, intercultural training/coaching and conflict management in order to facilitate cooperation in multicultural teams. The objective of these practices is 1) to identify a certain type of staff to recruit; 2) to train the staff recruited; and 3) to mediate (in the sense of preventing conflicts) between multicultural staff.

Recruitment

Recruitment is an important tool for Prometheus HRM. *"We recruit different nationalities considering the background of our clients. Each client must be able to operate in his mother tongue,"* (Mrs Wagner, Luxembourg). Through recruitment, every Human Resources Director responsible for his/her agency selects the right candidate for the right post. The right person must combine professional competencies with good language skills and also have the character traits necessary to work in an international environment (be empathic and positive, demonstrate an interest in other countries, show an interest in others, have capacity for negotiation, have an international background or experience, etc.) This recruitment policy became evident during our interviews, where we noticed that the most of the employees have an international background: some of them were born in multicultural families or abroad, or have worked for years abroad; many employees have also been working as expatriates inside the firm. It is clear that this kind of international experience facilitates working in a multicultural environment.

During interviews, however, we noticed differences in the recruitment process between agencies; these differences are often due to the personality of the Director, in question. For example, in the Luxembourg agency, Mrs Wagner, the local Human Resources Director, emphasises the importance of language skills: *"We only recruit staff with English language competencies"*. Therefore vacancies are

only published in English (whereas vacancies are only published in French in Paris). We observed the same difference between Paris and Luxembourg's agencies concerning the recruitment tests: in Paris, the Director preferred a French test from Pelletiers Consultants whereas in Luxembourg a multilingual test from Saville & Holdsworth Ltd was used.

For our recruitment process we use different tools as SHL (Saville & Holdsworth Ltd) created by British psychologists. We preferred this recruitment test to Pelletiers Consultants, used in Paris, because the SHL exists in several languages. The Pelletiers test is only in French. When recruiting different nationalities, I find it important that the questionnaire on personality can be answered in candidate's mother tongue (Mrs Wagner, Luxembourg).

In Luxembourg, recruitment tests were completed with personality tests and the Director often uses various *assessment centres* for recruiting managers: *"We work closely with psychologists so as to define managers' competencies and motivation. In the case of managers, we also use these services for outplacement,"* (Mrs Wagner).

Training/Coaching

"Intercultural training means learning about now other nationalities. This is why we organise intercultural training, though in Luxembourg this is limited to some common meetings outside work, in restaurants, for example" (Mrs Wagner, Luxembourg). Training in practice depends largely on the importance of the agency in question[11]. Therefore, intercultural training, is more structured in Paris (where there are around 500 employees) than in Luxembourg (where there is around 60 employees). In Paris, Mr Tisserand (local Human Resources Director, French nationality) outlines the importance of multicultural training: *"In my point of view, there should be even more specific training on different cultural customs and habits. We should have some kind of global guide of different behaviours based on cultures so that we could welcome everybody with respect and openness"*. In Paris, intercultural training is divided into three programmes including: (1) The management of different cultures and personalities, during a period of six months (this is only for managerial staff); (2) Information on behaviour – how to learn to recognise others and how to welcome them; and, (3) Different language lessons and intercultural training.

In addition to the above, expatriates benefit mainly from more specific training – *"In the case of expatriation, if a Luxembourg national leaves for a post in Japan, he will get specific training on local customs and habits"*, (Mr Robbins, Global Human Resources Director, London). These two categories of staff are regularly trained in intercultural

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9. Staff may also, subject to agreement by their supervisor or manager and if appropriate to their job, work in different workplaces other than the office (from client sites, from a different location, airport lounge, from home – not on a regular basis).

10. Offices are mostly open space offices for employees. Only managers have their own offices.

11. Based on budgetary reasons: big agencies benefit from bigger budget than small ones.

workshops often organised through teleconferences, which allow many employees to be simultaneously interconnected worldwide. Different coaching programmes (only for managers) are developed for managerial competencies and motivation at work.

Conflict management

"*Problems inside teams must be resolved by managers who know their team workers – you know them and you manage them. When there are common goals, there is a common agreement,*" (Mr Robbins, London). This general directive for conflict management is translated in the Luxembourg office by mediation and negotiation between the Director herself and the employees: knowing her staff well (there are only 50-60 employees) the Director seeks solutions by anticipating conflicts: *"In order to avoid conflicts, I'm myself mediate between employees",* (Mrs Wagner). In Paris, the local Director looks for conciliation between employees and tries to adapt to each different situation considering different cultures and individuals concerned:

> *"Lots of conflicts are related to individual characters. The French live with conflicts, Belgians can also disagree but they will react differently. Different cultures react and manage conflict situations in different ways. For example, the Dutch are very transparent and direct".*

Due to this global conflict management policy, most of the employees are convinced that there are no conflicts in teams (15 employees deny them and 7 recognise them). Conflict situations do, in fact, exist within the company (and amongst the multicultural personnel, they are often linked to language problems and other cultural differences particularly between Flemish and French-speaking Belgians), but they do not endanger the cooperation between the employees in the group. Many employees testify indeed conflicts between Belgians: "*The conflicts are between the Flemish and the Walloons on the one hand, and between the Belgians and the people from Luxembourg on the other hand. There is a "division" between the Flemish and the Walloons they don't want to work together*", (Mr Fischer, German engineer, Brussels); or, "*Conflicts exist between the Belgians: we know that this exists and so we are careful. We don't do politics in the office. We stay professional*", (Mr Gilbert, French-speaking Belgian, Brussels).

Those who recognise conflicts in firm believe that the cultural differences between colleagues do not, in fact, cause conflicts: "*There are some problems, but these are linked to personalities rather than cultural differences*", (Mr Martin, engineer team supervisor, French nationality); "*It all depends on individual personalities*", (Mr Simon, engineer, French-speaking Belgian). Other employ-

ees explain that, in general, conflicts occur as a result of their colleagues' personalities or because of ignorance of other cultures: "*Conflicts exist and, if there is a conflict, it is linked to the misunderstanding of another culture. Each culture has its own way of managing conflict, for example, the Anglo-Saxons and the Latin people are very different*", (Mr Durand, Paris). Two people believe that language problems cause "confusion and conflicts of interest".

These situations are described as "short-lived difficulties" or "misunderstandings" and, thus, of only moderate importance for the employees. Most of the employees are very understanding with regard to these situations: "*Sometimes we find it difficult to understand each other*", (Mr Simon); "*It's much easier if you understand the customs of other countries*", (Mrs Morin); "*We are very diplomatic*", (Mr Vandevelde, commercial professional, Dutch); "*This exists and so we are careful*", (Mr Gilbert), which apparently are resolved quite easily: "*You have to manage*", (Mr Saussure). Finally, conflicts are caused by "*confusion and conflicts of interest linked to work and not to people*" (Mr Simon, Mr Jacob, Mr Gilbert and Mr Van Eetvelde).

To these managerial practices (as detailed in table 3) we can add the effect of a very strong organisational culture (that is seen as a managerial tool in the company). This organisational culture has been developed and adapted to Prometheus by the international HRM.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE SEEN AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

The study on interactions reveals a strong common organisational culture in the company. This explains an overwhelming tolerance towards diversity that characterises Prometheus employees. It is based on the theory of "individual universalism" (as defined by anthropologists). This common conception of the "Other" characterises nearly all employees interviewed (19 out of 22) in different agencies around Europe with a positive attitude towards diversity in teams[12]. According to Jaques (1951), an organisational culture means a common way of thinking and acting, this is more or less shared in common and it must be learnt and accepted. This definition supposes that there exists in normal working relations less rational and conscious habits, of whose origins cannot be specified. Schein (1992) defines different dimensions of organisational culture in three levels: "artifacts", "espoused values" and "basic assumptions". In the sense of Schein's definition the Prometheus company culture can be related to the second level of espoused values. This is where (a) all group learning reflects original values; (b) what first begins as a shared value then becomes a shared assumption; (c) social validation happens with shared learning; and (d) these values are originated by management and then assimilated by the group.

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12. Only three employees from the Paris agency had reserves about this question (these were all of French nationality). Their reservations can be explained by the fact that they have come to Prometheus recently

through a business merger with a French firm and that they had some language problems in their working environment.

TABLE 3

Multicultural human resources management practices

Practice	Tools	Objectives	Results
Recruitment	(1) Recruitment tests: SHL in Luxembourg/ Actas Consultants in Paris; (2) Assessment Centres; (3) Personality and different capacity tests.	Select candidates considering their professional competencies and language skills including their character traits.	Staff "cadre"*, engineers, with the capacity to work in an international working environment, having knowledge of several languages (Exception: the Paris agency).
Training/ Coaching	(1) Management of different cultures and personalities; (2) "Behaviour" Management; (3) Language lessons and cultural training; (4) Coaching for managers (motivation/ competencies).	(1) How to learn to recognise others; how to welcome them; (2) How to respect the difference of others.	Global staff training centre in Switzerland with local training centres. Managers training higher priority. Differences between agencies.
Conflict Management	(1) Proximity Management – mutual adjustment by managers who travel to meet their team workers in virtual teams; (2) Participative Management – supervisors as coordinators (3) Mediation and negotiation by HRD.	"*Problems inside teams must be resolved by managers who know their team workers*", Mr Robbins, Global HRM Director, London	Less disagreement and difficulties inside teams. These situations are rarely related to the culture. They are due to different personalities.

* Includes, in France, employees with 4 or 5 years of education after the Baccalaureate, at the university or in "Grandes Ecoles"

This common understanding was confirmed by the analysis of perception of culture, and also by the analysis of stereotypes and of the recognition of the "Other". The common understanding gives a strong common identity to the whole staff of Prometheus, because it binds together all different cultural identities and goes beyond every national culture. This is why the staff seem to be united and escape from the traditional divisions between national cultures. The characteristics of this culture can be described as follows:

(1) Existing conflicts: despite the strong organisational culture, conflicts exist in the company but these situations are limited and rarely disturb cooperation in teams. Many employees think that a colleague's cultural background is not connected to conflict: "*There are conflicts within the teams, but these conflicts are linked to the characters and personalities of the people involved and to cultural differences*", (Mr Jacob, Sales manager); "*There aren't any conflicts in our team. If there are any conflicts locally, they're not due to cultural differences. At Prometheus the staff move around a lot*", (Mrs Jardin, Brussels).

(2) Presence of stereotypes: even if the strong organisational culture attenuates the perception of the difference between nationalities, it does not prevent the presence of stereotypes. These are very frequent during meetings where employees use them as "jokes", between neighbour nationalities (cultural differences between Belgian French and Flemisch speakers or between French and German speakers).

The stereotypes are very present in our meetings, between French and Germans, for example, and between Belgians and Dutch. There is a belief that the Dutch are more professional than the Belgians. There are also some negative attitudes towards Italians, for example. Some consider them lazy. That is not true. I have worked some years in Italy and I found them very hard-working, (Mr Gilbert, commercial professional, French-speaking Belgian).

Many employees seem to think that it is a way of bringing together different cultures: "*In every culture there are some common components*", (Mr Martin); "*By using stereotypes, we come together*", (Mrs Papas, commercial professional, Greek nationality).

(3) Facility in adaptation in a multicultural environment: in general, the employees' reactions confirm an overall satisfaction with their working environment. Different factors contribute to the facility of adaptation: in Luxembourg, the adaptation is facilitated by the international climate of the city. Many declare curiosity about other cultures or confident with other cultures to be enriching:

TABLE 4

Prometheus culture: workers' opinions and values

Indicators	Characteristics	Examples	Consequences
Presence of conflicts	Limited. Conflicts are not related to a specific culture. They are related to personalities or characters.	"*Problems do exist, but they are not related to cultures […] more to characters or to personalities*", Mr Martin, engineer/team manager, French.	Employees measure working situations. They try to prevent conflicts and talk about "*short-lived difficulties*" or "*misunderstandings*".
Presence of stereotypes	Stereotypes are considered like jokes; as a way of bringing together cultures. (Except in Belgium, between French and Flemish speaking Belgians).	"*By using stereotypes, we bring us together*", Mrs Papas, commercial, Greek; "*In every culture there are some common components*", Mr Martin, engineer/team manager, French.	Tolerance and comprehension about different working situations.
Easier adaptation and internal integration	Global positive working attitude. Based on a personal choice of willing to work in an international working environment.	Curiosity to meet and work with different cultures; enriching experience; personal choice for career.	General work satisfaction. International working environment seen as a source of motivation – because there is no discrimination on the basis of separate cultures, everybody is accepted.
Recognition of others	Universal conception of human beings.	"*We must consider individuals […] they are important*", Mr Van Eetvelde, commercial, Dutch; "*The personality is not related to a national culture*", Mr Kirk, commercial, Belgian Flemish; "*One's personality is important, one's life and reactions*", Mr Benfredt, marketing commercial, Algerian.	

I find it very enriching to work in Prometheus. I think that cultural differences must be considered but it should not be a question of exceptions. It is a question of respect. For me, the working environment is a business environment where personal sensibilities don't belong. Sometimes, contacts between employees begin naturally. We all react differently according to our culture, because we are all different inside one culture (Mr Benfredt, commercial marketing, Algerian nationality).

Many employees also outline their willingness to work in this kind of international environment:

I have been working in a multicultural environment for twenty years now. It is really a choice for me. I think that cultural differences must be considered in working places. Behaviours change between different countries. We should be aware of basic differences between cultures and behaviours. People have different behaviours and manners in Great-Britain and in Japan […] I have learnt that we must be very careful when facing others.

We are different. We must make the effort. I personally like it, it is a challenge (Mr Ceccarelli, commercial professional, Italian nationality).

For some others, the multicultural environment is not a problem in itself because only the professionalism is important:

The fact of working in a multicultural environment is a simple reality – we should not stop with the question of the nationality because the competencies are more important. We must manage and respect cultural differences. We must learn to understand others, by exchange and by contacts" (Mr Fischer, team supervisor for engineers, Brussels, German nationality).

(4) Recognition of others. As indicated above, the common understanding of others is globally shared in the company. This understanding not only gives a favourable perception of diversity but also enables to everyone to recognise oneself in it. As result, it is more important for Prometheus employees to know other colleagues as indi-

viduals – by their personality and character – than with reference to their national culture. *"We must consider individuals […] They are important"*, (Mr Van Eetvelde, Dutch nationality); *"The personality is more important than the national culture"*, (Mr Kirk); *"The personality is important, one's life, one's reactions"*, (Mr Benfredt); *"We should not consider cultural differences too much. The best way is to respect others,"* (Mrs Jardin, commercial professional, French nationality).

Finally we conclude that this organisational culture is a common understanding which does not exclude conflicts but limits their development. In addition the Prometheus organisational culture overcomes the problems related to national stereotypes by allowing individuals to act with more understanding and tolerance. This particular organisational culture seems to contribute to making internal integration easier, and also is the basis for the recognition of others. In addition, we can underline that this organisational culture helps employees with confronting a cultural shock deriving from cultures' different conceptions on local practices (employment law, etiquette, etc.), on local habits and manners, and on local contextual interpretation (Chevrier, 2000).

Based on a common understanding and common values shared by all the staff, the organisational culture can thus be seen as a factor that contributes cooperation. According to Mrs Wagner (Luxembourg),

> *The multicultural working environment increases employees' performance in their daily work. Actually, when you come into contact daily with individuals representing different nationalities, it is a permanent work of research on yourself. […] Employees working in this kind of multicultural environment, develop their openness to differences, accepting more easily the introduction of new materials for work, new projects, new types of management and change.*

Discussion and conclusions

Our primary interest in this study was to understand the role of multicultural factors and the difficulty of managing multicultural work groups. The study was focused on team functioning and how to create cooperation between employees representing different cultural backgrounds in multicultural teams. Because of the nature of the study, based on human resources management in organisations, the research methodology was quite "naturally" orientated towards an empirical analysis.

The first analysis, in line with Dass and Parker (1999) and Irrmann (2008), on the organisation of work conditions as well as on the managerial role in multicultural teams, revealed that the company's organisation structure can be considered as favourable in managing multicultural work groups. This is the Prometheus structural configuration ("adhocracy") that permits organisational flexibility making it easier to introduce different management practices inside the organisation and allowing proximity management between managers and their team workers (as underlined by Irrmann, 2008; 146). This type of approach based on coordination is particularly important in the case of virtual teams in which the interpersonal dynamics and communication are more difficult to realise than in "traditional" teams[13].

The Prometheus case is an example of British management style. According to Calori and De Woot (1994), the British management style is often located between an American and Continental European management style. Characterised by its liberalism, the British management style prefers direct and pragmatic relations between people and has an aversion to formal procedures (Calori and Osterrieth, 2002). If the organisational flexibility and coordination seem to create favourable conditions in management in Prometheus, many authors (e.g. Maznevski and Peterson, 1997), think that this type of structural configuration allows uncertainty and ambiguity in organisations. These authors stress how cultural differences are more frequently expressed in organisational settings, where the demand for a single response is less prevalent. In addition they stress how cultural differences are less often expressed in strong organisational settings, where only one particular response would be tolerated or considered effective. A strong organisational setting is one where there are procedures, explicit rules, and policies to guide behaviour. Dass and Parker (1999) indicate that this type of configuration is usually dominant when there are few pressures for diversity and managers view diversity as a marginal issue.

In our second analysis, we observed exchanges between members, including conflicts. These observations revealed differences in interactions depending on the type of team. The locally based team (T1) was a stable team with little incidence of conflicts; more mobile teams (T2 and T5) had less social relations; and virtual teams (T3 and T4) had permanent relations via the internet and telecommunications. In all teams it was noticed that conflicts had little impact. Employees showed a "reserved" or a "diplomatic" attitude towards conflict. The managers' role in teams varied between teams and was highly important in virtual teams, depending more upon the manager's personality than on team structure.

The interaction analysis based on the perception of the "Other", demonstrated the role of the cultural factor in social relationships between employees. Specifically, it revealed a common conception of people called an "individual universalism" (based on anthropology) where the employees have a "favourable" perception of diversity. This common

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13. This remark concerns also teams 2 and 5.

approach seems to unite the employees and to contribute to cohesion inside the company. According to Chanlat (1995; 2005) and d'Iribarne (2004), the anthropological contribution is important in multicultural staff management. Thus, the "universal individualism" approach regards human beings as being defined by the same biological origins. Hall (1971) indicates that "universal individualism" is "a universal physiological basis to the understanding of individuals, to which culture gives additional structure and signification". Furthermore, when considering Milton and Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, they minimise this process of difference and the emphasis on the communality of human beings in terms of physiological similarity (e.g. "After all, we are all human"). In other words Milton and Bennett focus on attempt to ignore cultural differences. Surprisingly enough Prometheus is using this conception as a positive meaning of the organisational culture that seems to facilitate adaptation and integration into the firm. This remark accords with the latest work of Randel and Earley (2009), who underline the importance of an organisational culture respecting cultural differences and diversity in international firms.

In many cases, the multicultural phenomenon is subjected on employees; however, in the case of Prometheus, the employees choose to enter into this multicultural organisation and therefore are, for the most of them, recruited on this basis. While maintaining the multicultural phenomenon, the HRM of Prometheus puts in place different management tools which all promote cooperation and understanding amongst different cultures (as shown in table 2).

This common understanding and behaviour is at the heart of the organisational culture in the firm (table 3). It is communicated to the personnel by means of organisational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978) and, in particular, by the teams, which play an important role in identification, training and control. Thévenet and Vachette (1992) explain that learning in group not only gives a possibility of developing individual synergies and of obtaining common behaviours, but also facilitates creativity and innovation. Learning gives to individuals more efficacy when they develop a mutual enrichment.

Our contribution to the existing studies is to demonstrate through the Prometheus case study: 1) that cooperation can be created and maintained in multicultural work groups; 2) a contribution to the existing cooperation models with new theories originated from economy of conventions (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1987) or Actor-Network theory (Callon and Latour, 1978). The objective of these theories is to propose models for cooperation construc-

tion. As explained in the terms of Boltanski and Thévénot, the Prometheus organisational culture can be seen as the goal for cooperation or a "common superior principle" (as translated by the convention model[14]) or a common agreement[15] which binds together team members. The "common superior principle" (organisational culture) then becomes a common basis for collective action and a justification for it. The "common superior principle" is at the heart of cooperation and social construction which goes beyond individual differences. Whereas the convention model justifies a central role, the translation model of Callon and Latour focuses on understanding between actors and between groups through their interactions, considering not only group dynamics but also technical matters. Network building and maintenance is based on using a language understood by all actors: this explains the necessity of having translators and spokespersons in the network. In other words, the translation process becomes a space for negotiation (Callon, 1989) where arrangements and compromises can be developed. Prometheus managerial practices can be explained in these terms. For example, a common understanding of the concept of diversity and human beings, firstly (creation of common good); and secondly, the role of HRM, which can be seen as a mediator or spokesperson in the firm, whilst to prevent conflicts and maintain cooperation ("*The role of the HRM is to mediate between people and problems […] In order to avoid conflicts, it is me who mediates between the people involved*", Mrs Wagner, Luxembourg). This theory looks to gather different perceptions from individuals, via the translator (e. g. HRM) which then transfers the information by mediation.

In relation to the results of the study, we can make some hypotheses for managing multicultural work groups:

(1) There exist organisation structures that are more favourable in adapting to an appropriate multicultural team management; this can facilitate social interactions in a company;

(2) In our study we have observed cultural differences and different cultural identities in Prometheus. These differences can be a source for conflicts. We think that cultural differences demonstrate themselves more in intercultural situations like market conquest other international exchanges than in multicultural situations (as the case of Prometheus where the multicultural situations are permanent and often sought by the employees);

(3) Cultural differences can be managed by managerial practices and human resources management tools (recruitment, training, etc.);

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14. According to the convention model (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p. 231-41), cooperation can be explained by "a common action" in which individuals act together. This common action can be seen as a "common superior principle" which translates a collective meaning for common willing to work together (with common interests).

15 The notion of "compromise" can already be found in the works of Adler (1986) who proposes a model for working in a multicultural work group. This model consists of three different dynamics: (1) domination; (2) compromise; (3) synergy. See also Schneider and Barsoux (2003), who classify "compromise" as a degree of cooperation (p. 238).

(4) An organisational culture can be based on cultural differences – in the context of Prometheus these differences are minimised by the similarity of human beings.

In line with the work of Bournois, Defelix and Retour (2000), the Prometheus case shows the importance of the HRM in an international company: this operates on different levels: (1) on an organisational level: it seeks to reduce the effect of differences (different cultures and professions) through "smart working" politics by arranging favourable working conditions; (2) on a human resources management level: where it applies different practices and tools that promote cooperation between cultures; and finally (3) by constructing an organisational culture that promotes the same conception of human beings. Dass and Parker (1999) state in this sense, that there is no single best way to manage workforce diversity in organisations. The management depends on the degree of pressure for diversity, the type of diversity in question and on managerial attitudes.

This is why we think that it is necessary to recognise *national cultures* and *cultural identities* (explaining the origins of different individuals) when analysing multicultural teams in order to create *cooperation* (construction of a common action in a particular situation) between employees representing different cultural backgrounds. As indicated above, these different cultural identities vary in different interaction contexts and *situations* (in our study, the particular *situations* were observed in five multicultural teams, where interactions varied from one team to another). The situation in question contains different factors as organisational approach and managerial attitudes that all contribute to cooperation. In the centre of the *cooperation* there is "a common accord" or a compromise that can be translated in the case of Prometheus by the *organisational culture – a common conception of human beings*. This is the result of the human resources *management* policy and practises which seeks to obtain a maximum *cooperation* in the firm (the construction of a common action based on an organisational culture which contributes to general work satisfaction – because everybody is accepted without discrimination). This particular case demonstrates an example of how the multicultural staff can be managed via recruitment (and selection) by hiring individuals who are "predisposed" to an international working environment: openness and language competencies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The main limits for this research are methodological and concern firstly the data, then the nature of the results and finally, the implication for future research.

Our primary difficulty during this research work was our methodological choice. Instead of doing a participative observation in Prometheus, as we had originally planned, we did face-to-face interviews in a limited time schedule. The advantage of this method is that it gave us some independence from the firm and its employees; we were not influenced or manipulated by the employees through the interactions that the researchers created during a long stay in the firms observed. Concerning the nature of the results, it is important to remember that they describe "reality" the way the employees perceive it. The obtained results are "subjective" in these conditions and become more "objective" only after their analyses. The role of the researcher is to understand the "employees' viewpoints" and to construct a signification of their views afterwards. In these conditions also, the role of the researcher is quite delicate, because he may be influenced by his own conceptions and values in his analysis and interpretation.

As the implication of the results for future research, we may say that the empirical study on Prometheus confirmed the validity of our observations in this case. In this kind of Emic approach (vs Etic[16] approach) (Pike, 1954) the facts of each organisation are at the centre of the study: all intrinsic details like history or culture or production (related to the different environment of the firm – social, economic, political, competitive, etc.) of the firm have their importance. As the Prometheus case outlines, there is not only one "Prometheus situation" but inside Prometheus there are several particular situations linked to the management of different multicultural teams (different teams are composed of different nationalities representing different cultural identities; teams' functioning is different according to their group situation if these are local work groups or virtual ones, etc.). That is why it has been suggested that it is appropriate to analyse each different management situation so as to find an adapted management solution to each situation concerned. The comprehension of particular management situations should be based on an analysis of inter- and intra-group relationships, especially through a psychosociological approach with a consideration of the cultural dimensions that contributes to this complexity (Granrose and Oskamp, 1997).

A further point concerning future research is that it would be necessary to enlarge the study beyond Europe to see if our conclusions can cover the whole Prometheus organisation in America, Asia and the Middle East, because our actual conclusions are based on Prometheus' European agencies. What would be the results if the rest of the world was included? Would the influence of other cultures change the global human resources management attitude of Prometheus, or could we still conclude on the efficiency of Prometheus management process and its tools. One of these efficient tools is recruitment which allows the selec-

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16. In an Etic approach organisational facts are studied on a more global level; their influence on a global context

tion of the type of "Prometheus" person capable of meeting the requirements of the organisation and its changes.

In the longer term, it would be possible also to examine if some of the Prometheus management tools and practices can be transferred to other international companies. By doing this, we should not forget the particularity of different management models, because several authors think (eg. Bouilloud, 1995) that it is impossible to establish laws in the field of management. However, it is possible to try to understand every different management situation, to analyse its functioning. This is what Adler (1986) already recommended in her work in the management of multicultural work groups: the process of developing culturally synergistic solutions to organisational problems involves *situation description*, *cultural interpretation* and *cultural creativity*.

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