

Multinational Teams and National Preference of Learning Style from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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“I move through my daily round of tasks and meetings with a fair sense of what the issues are, of what others are saying and thinking, and with ideas about actions to take. Yet I am occasionally upended by unforeseen circumstances, miscommunications, and dreadful miscalculations. It is in this interplay between expectation and experience that learning occurs. In Hegel’s phrase, “Any experience that does not violate expectation is not worthy of the name experience.” And yet somehow, the rents that these violations cause in the fabric of my experience are magically repaired, and I face the next day a bit changed but still the same person.”

(Kolb, 1984, p.28)

1. Introduction

Cultural awareness is a prerequisite to succeed in international business today, dealing with multiple nationalities introduce the need for increased knowledge and understanding of the influence of national culture in multinational teams.

Experiential learning literature has suggested individual preference of learning as influencing team's functional processes and performance. Where learning about and creating awareness of teams' functional aspects facilitate team development and increase the level of performance. Lack of training and awareness has been assigned as being the main reasons for failure or unsuccessful team performance. However, there has not been much research on the phenomena of *national* preference of learning style and how it influences the functional processes and performance in a multinational team context.

Deriving from the identified knowledge gap, a general theoretical model explaining the phenomena of national preference of learning style in relation to the general social functioning of multinational teams is presented in Chapter 3. The ambition is to theoretically explain the phenomena's influence on multinational team's functional processes and performance. Further, a cross-cultural comparative-analysis between Germany and Mexico, predicting their national preference of learning style is presented in Chapter 4. Based on the two collective groups' behavioral characteristics in a multinational team context, the analysis contributes to a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under study and its influence on functional processes and performance. The latter chapter presents a conceptual model, entailing the thesis development of a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study.

The thesis' research has a strong theoretical foundation, based on acknowledge literature and theories. The thesis' generalized findings are based on a complementary procedure – where the theoretically framework is based on other researchers' interpretations, whereby the indirect interpretations made are presented in the thesis theoretical- and conceptual model. The validity of the thesis findings is therefore argued to be valid.

1.2. Research Background

In the last two decades organizations have experienced rapid business environmental changes, where globalization of economic activity and restructuring of companies are two forces influencing organizations' work environment (Earley & Gibson, 2002). Technological innovation has changed how information, knowledge and communication is being handled, products and process activities, as well as reduced the geographical distance as a liability (Dicken, 2007). As a result of this, organizations respond to such environmental changes by rearranging their organizational structures. The organizational structure – the design and functioning of an organization needs to match the company's strategy in order to take advantage of opportunities, and face challenges introduced by the rapid changing work environment (Deresky 2000). Internationalization and globalization strategies of organizations have geographically spread their functioning areas and economic activities around the globe. As a consequence, organizations increasingly use multinational teams as a resource to handle the complexity of work tasks introduced by the reorganization of organizational structures (Earley and Gibson 2002).

There are many types of group or team functioning in organizations such as, for example, a management group of an international joint venture or acquisition, new product development group, a group composition for integrating international strategies, recommendation and developing group and top management group (Hambrick et al, 1998). However, based on the thesis ambition of providing a conceptual explanation and understanding of the influence *national preference of learning style* on multinational teams' functional processes and performance, a more general view of a multinational team will be adapted.

A multinational team is referred to as a hypothetical team deriving from the more general requirements description of a group argued by MaGrath (1984 cited in Earley and Gibson, 2002). Hence, multinational teams is defined in the thesis, on a general basis, as a specific type of team based on the requirements of containing two or more people belonging to different collective groups, having interdependency functioning, and the awareness of the potentially interaction of a dynamic interrelation which over time ought to guide the team to reach objectives given to them by an external force. Hence, multinational teams and its general social functioning has become

the main area under study in this thesis research, more specifically how members in a multinational team goes about learning and team development, where national cultures/values is the foundation of how we as human beings approaches and adapts to our environmental circumstances. How human beings approaches and adapts is suggested in the thesis to influence functional processes and performance in a multinational team context.

Deriving from Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory and Kayes et al's (2005a, 2005b) research, team functioning and development is closely linked to the process of learning from experience. Learning about and creating awareness of the team's development is suggested to be the key for teams to successfully function, and to reach a higher level of performance. The process of learning is suggested through Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model to be a circular, dynamic four stage development, where the creation of new knowledge, attitudes and abilities are grounded in a team's earlier experiences. Each of the four stages in the creation of new knowledge, attitudes, and abilities entails certain features of how experiences develop. Further, these four stages have been identifies as being four different learning styles – which separately have been identified by Kolb (1984) to be individuals preferred learning styles.

Kayes et al (2005a, 2005b) research has suggested that a team goes through the same learning stages as individuals. However, where the literature has addressed the concept of individual preference of learning style, little attention have been devoted to the phenomena of *national preference of learning style* in a multinational team context and how it influences multinational teams functional processes and performance. The identified knowledge gap in the literature has led to the thesis problem formulation.

1.3. Problem Formulation

“How does national preference of learning style influence a multinational team's functional processes and performance?”

1.4. Research Objectives

Deriving from the above mentioned issues and the thesis problem formulation, a thoroughgoing understanding of the concepts to be applied in the thesis research are required. This requirement is addressed throughout the development of the thesis conceptual framework. Nevertheless, for simplicity some basic concepts and interpretations are listed in section 1.5. Basic Definitions and Interpretations. The thesis theoretical framework, presented in Chapter 3 serves as the general, theoretical foundation, and guides the development of the thesis's overall conceptual framework. To clarify, the thesis research objectives are:

Ambition: Explain

1. Develop a methodological- and theoretical framework;
2. Create a theoretical model by identifying components and factors in the literature, which ought to theoretically explain the phenomena of national preference of learning style and its influence on multinational team's functional processes and performance;
3. Explain theoretically the components, factors and their relations;

Ambition: Understand

4. Develop an understanding of the phenomena under study through a contextual analysis – a cross-cultural comparative-analyses between Germany and Mexico;
5. Develop hypotheses predicting national behavioural characteristics which ought to describe their national preference of learning style;
6. Develop a conceptual model describing their national preference of learning styles influence on the multinational team's functional processes and performance from a holistic perspective.

1.5. Basic Definitions and Interpretations

Collective Group: Deriving from Hofstede's theoretical framework – collective group is used in this thesis as a description of group of people/members/individuals with the same national origin and/or cultural values/mental programs (Hofstede, 1984, 2001).

Complementary procedure: *“A transformative operation, where a technique/method/theory from one methodological view is being brought into another methodological view and inevitably transformed by being so...”* (Arbnor & Bjerke 2009, p.418).

Finality relations: *“A presumed relationship between an explaining factor (producer) and a factor being explained (product), that is, to explain by the purpose they serve rather than by postulated previous causes...”* (Arbnor & Bjerke 2009, p.421).

Group dynamic: is understood and referred to in this thesis, deriving from the interpretations made by Earley and Mosakowski (2000) in their research on team culture as – coherence in team interaction. Hence, over time a team develops a set of rules and norms, mutual expectations of individual's development as well as the group's development, this fosters a coherency between the team members by acting similarly, based on their shared set of values and meanings they have developed over time as a team.

Heterogenic team: is a team composed by members from more than two different collective groups (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000).

Homogeneous team: is a team composed by members from one collective group or from seemingly similar collective groups (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000).

Metaphor: *“In science, a concept, an abstraction or image placed by the creator of knowledge on one situation in the study area, taken from another or different situation, where the qualities of the intrinsic sense of the metaphor thus are transferred to the object in question in the first situation.”* (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009, p.422)

Moderate heterogenic team: is a team composed by members from two different collective groups (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000).

Multinational team: is defined in this thesis on a general basis as a specific type of team based on the requirements of containing two or more people with different nationalities or cultural backgrounds and functioning of interdependency – the awareness of the potentially interaction of a dynamic interrelation over time ought to guide the team to reach their objectives given to them by an external force (based on McGrath, 1984 cited in Earley and Gibson, 2002, and Earley and Gibson, 2002).

Performance: *“Performance is limited in short-term adaptation to immediate circumstances, learning encompasses somewhat longer-term mastery of generic classes of situations, and development encompasses lifelong adaptation to one’s total life situation”* (Kolb, 1984, p.34).

Process of learning: is in the thesis understood as the creation of new knowledge, attitudes, and abilities – which is theoretically explained through Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory.

Subgroup: a subgroup is in the thesis understood as the creation of an additional unofficial grouping of individuals within a team, here in the thesis as grouping of individuals from one specific collective group (Earley and Gibson, 2002).

Team functional processes: a dynamic process of team development facilitated by the team’s group dynamic, which guides and steers the team’s adaptation and responding to its immediate work environment (identified in the thesis as team contextual environment) (Kayes et al, 2005a).

Team requirements: *“...it must include two or more people, but it must remain relatively small so that all members can be mutually aware of and potentially in interaction with one another. Such mutual awareness and potential interaction provide at least a minimum degree of interdependence; that is, members’ choices and behaviors take one another into account. Interdependency, in turn, implies some degree of continuity over time: these relationships have, or quickly acquire, some history, and some anticipated future. A time based, mutual interdependence can reasonably be termed “dynamic”. In other words a <team> is an aggregation of two or more people who are to some degree in dynamic interrelation with one another...”* (McGrath, 1984 cited in Earley & Gibson, 2002, p.2)

Team skills: is in the thesis understood as a dynamic process which develops over time, and entails the awareness of the team’s learning process and group dynamic (Kayes et al, 2005a).

2. Methodological Framework

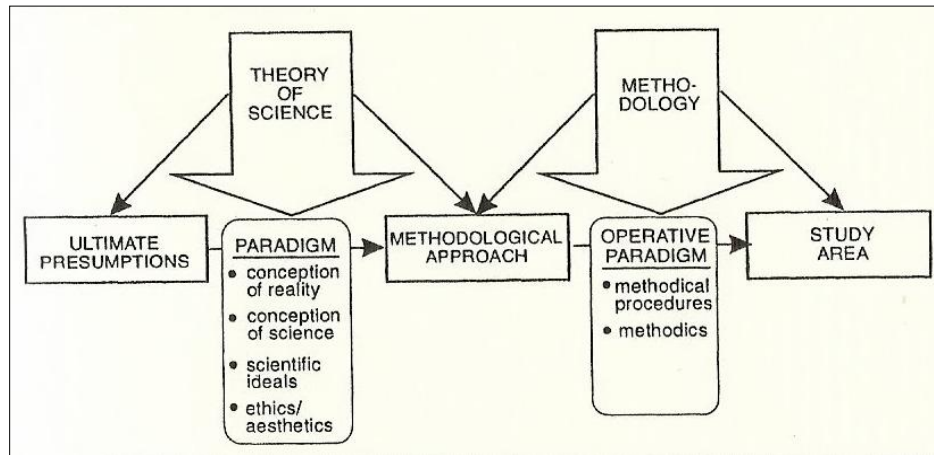
All valid scientific and business research is directed by methodology, guiding the researcher throughout the study by the use of a particular methodological approach. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to present the thesis methodological framework, choice of methodological approach which connects the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 with the area under study. First, the forthcoming section will provide a short description of the thesis choice of methodological approach. Second, the thesis methodics is explained – how the thesis obtained its results and how it was conducted in practice, which is illustrated in Figure 2 Research Plan. The chapter ends with a small section, addressing the validity of the thesis research.

2.1. Methodological Approach

The thesis has adapted the methodological framework of Arbnor and Bjerke (1997, 2009), illustrated in Figure 1 under, which consist of two main areas – theory of science and methodology. The first area, *theory of science* consists of philosophical thoughts (ontology) – how the researcher view himself or herself in relation to the environmental surroundings, and philosophical presumptions (epistemology) – how to go about to acquire knowledge. Arbnor and Bjerke (1997) refer to ontology and epistemology, as the researcher’s ultimate presumptions. Based on established methodological presumptions in the theory of science, Arbnor and Bjerke’s have classified a continuum of six different paradigms in relation to business research methodology (see Appendix 1 for detailed description). (Arbnor and Bjerke, 1997, 2009)

A paradigm according to Arbnor and Bjerke (1997), consist of four components, respectively *conception of reality, conception of science, scientific ideals* and *ethical and aesthetical aspects*. The components allows the researchers to create a methodological framework, based on his or hers ultimate presumptions – which guides the researcher throughout the study. The steering “mechanism” of a researcher’s ultimate presumptions cannot be empirical or logical tested, because it is firmly grounded in an individual’s experience and “*fundamental belief of reality and life*” (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009, p. 426).

Figure 1: Methodology



Source: Arbnor & Bjerke (1997, p. 17)

The second area, illustrated in Figure 1 above, is *methodology* and consists of an operative paradigm – how to go about using a specific methodological approach in practice. Arbnor and Bjerke (1997) have distinguished three different methodological approaches which are dominating in business research – *the analytical approach*, *the systems approach* and *the actor approach*. These three methodological approaches use different terminology, concepts and ultimate presumptions – which explain how the researcher applies/connects a methodological approach in relation to the study area. The ultimate presumptions guide the researcher by steering the choice of a paradigm, methodological approach and operative paradigm and link it to the area under study. A short description of the basic characteristics of the three methodological approaches follows in the forthcoming paragraphs.

The analytical approach, presents an objective reality where the ambition is to explain causality-relations. The reality is explained through components with cause-effect relations, meaning that one specific condition leads to another. This entails dividing reality into smaller parts, operationalize these into concepts and relate them to a cause-effect relation – by verifying hypothesis or falsifying thesis. *The systems approach*, presents a reality where the ambition is to explain and/or gain deeper understanding through developing knowledge about the area under study. The reality is presumed to be holistic where determining finality relations between an explaining factor and a factor(s) being explained is the aim of the approach. The analytical approach aims to explain specific cause(s) and possible outcome(s) to be used as a universal

explanation, whereas the systems approach explains relations between the factors in contextual circumstances. On the other hand, there is *the actor approach* which differs from the two other approaches in its perception of reality – reality in the analytical approach is presumed to be subjective, this type of study is only applicable and valid for a specific contextual study. The latter approach's ambition is to understand the actors involved in the study, whereas in the analytical approach it is to explain objectively the cause-effect relation, and in the systems approach to explain finality relations. The system approach lies in the middle of the objective-subjective continuum, illustrated in Appendix 1, meaning that reality is objectively accessible, however the researcher is aware of subjective influences, and an increased understanding of the area under study is reached by placing it in a contextual reality. (Arbnor and Bjerke, 1997, 2009)

The ultimate presumptions held by the author of the thesis, have influenced the thesis applied paradigm - *conception of reality, conception of science, scientific ideals and ethics/aesthetics*, which has steered the thesis's paradigm classification, methodological approach, and operative paradigm in relation to the area under study. Hence, has led to the thesis choice of *the systems approach* as methodological approach undertaken. Prerequisites deriving from this methodological approach have influenced how business reality is viewed in the thesis (Arbnor and Bjerke 2009). Thus, reality represents a world where knowledge can be systematized and the researcher acknowledges its influence by subjectivity (Arbnor and Bjerke 1997).

Business reality is seen as being objectively accessible – making it possible to construct a theoretical model entailing elements explaining the phenomena under study. The identified elements – components and factors, illustrated in Figure 5, influence each other which bring about a conceptual explanation of how national behavioural characteristics influence a multinational team's functional processes and performance from a holistic perspective, illustrated in Figure 9. Further, the holistic perspective gives insight of how a team goes about their work tasks and existence, in order to reach the level of expected performance. The team interacts with its immediate environment, and develops dynamically by learning from past experiences. The interaction, between the team and its environment brings about synergy effect, where a team's development influences team purpose. (Arbnor and Bjerke, 1997, 2009; Kayes et al, 2005a)

Knowledge is gained through the process of experiential learning, which is a subjective process of grasping and transforming team experiences. Unconsciously or consciously, experiences develop through several stages, by grasping and transforming the immediate environmental surroundings, whereby experiences evolves as redefined and/or new knowledge, attitude or abilities. This process is viewed as dynamic, where past experiences are the foundation for the development of new experiences. Multinational team development is influenced by cultural values, and through the creation of awareness and reflection of team experiences, facilitates the team to reach higher level of performance through the transaction between the team members and its immediate surroundings. (Kolb, 1984; Kayes et al 2005a)

The forthcoming section will explain the methodics undertaken entailing the thesis' research design, illustrated in Figure 2, in the forthcoming section.

2.2. Methodics

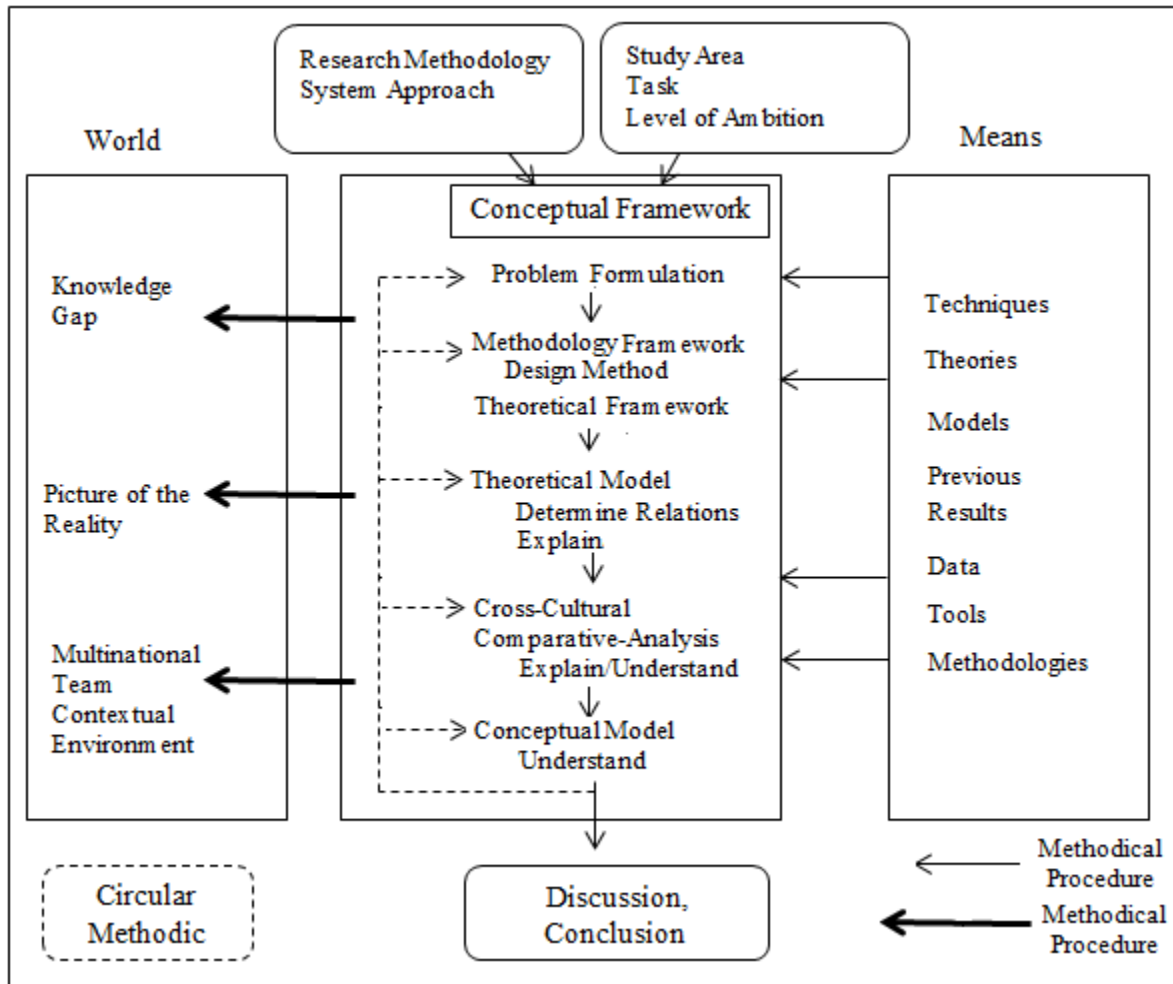
Deriving from the chosen methodological approach this have consequently determined the thesis operative paradigm and research design. The research design serves here as a guide for how the thesis research is conducted in practice, within the methodological framework developed by Arbnor and Bjerke (1997, 2009). Arbnor and Bjerke (1997, p.454) defines methodics as *“the way which a creator of knowledge relates and arranges the techniques made into methods in a study plan and the way in which a study is actually conducted within the framework of a methodological approach in relation to an area under study”*. Figure 2 Research Design presented in the next subsection illustrates how the thesis research was planned and conducted.

2.2.1. Research Design

The thesis research design has guided the thesis' research process and creation of knowledge in relation to the chosen methodological approach– *the systems approach*. There are three main areas represented in Figure 2 under, respectively *means*, *conceptual framework*, and *world*.

The *conceptual framework* presented in this thesis is influenced by the methodological approach – *the systems approach*, which influences the thesis aim of reaching generalized findings through the developed of a conceptual framework, entailing the methodological- and theoretical framework, cross-cultural comparative-analysis of Germany and Mexico and a conceptual model. The analysis draws on generalization about human beings and their behavioristics at the national level, in order to theoretically explain and gain a broader understanding of how national preference of learning style influences multinational teams’ functional processes and performance.

Figure 2: Research Design



Source: Own creation based on Svane (2010 cited in Kuada, 2010, p.63)

Methodological Procedures

In order to reach generalized findings, different *means* has been used through the use of methodological procedures which are in line with the systems approach. Methodological procedure is defined by Arbnor and Bjerke (2009, p.423) as “*the way the creator of knowledge incorporates, develops, and/or modifies a technique or a previous result and/or theory in a methodological view...*”. First, the technique used to select the area under study has been influenced by the choice of methodological approach, consequently the reality is perceived as holistic and complex. The ambition is to create a picture of the business reality of multinational teams by developing a conceptual model of an open system – describing the phenomena under study. (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009)

The conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 9, is a descriptive model of the phenomena under study, which is based on the developed theoretical model, illustrated in Figure 5. Chapter 3 is the general, theoretical foundation for the development of the thesis’ theoretical model and provides the theoretical explanation of components’- and factors’ relations. The cross-cultural comparative-analysis, presented in Chapter 4, uses the latter model in its analysis, which provides a further understanding of the phenomena under study and contributes to the thesis development of a conceptual model. Both of the thesis models needs to be viewed in a holistic perspective, where components and factors influences another, are interrelated, and represents a dynamic process of team development. Due to the chosen methodological approach the models describes a rather complex reality which is reflected in the extent of a rather broad perspective throughout the body of the research – the effect of this has been the need of describing many aspects related to a multinational team. However, the ambition of the thesis is not to provide analyzes on a detailed level, but to contribute to the identified knowledge gap in the literature by gaining a broader understanding of the phenomena under study. (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009)

Further, the conceptual model, being an open system as described by Arbnor and Bjerke (1997, 2009) means that there is a need for defining a system boarder. The system boarder, illustrated clearly in the models, illustrated in Figure 5 and 9, entails those components which are viewed as relevant to explain/understand the phenomena under study. The factors in the theoretical model are seen as forces influencing the system (being a multinational team) these are however to some extent not controllable for the members in the system being described/explained. Throughout the

development of the thesis' conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 9, a better understanding of inputs and outputs, and feedback mechanisms which influence and are being influenced by the multinational team are presented. (Arbnor and Bjerke, 1997, 2009)

Techniques used to collecting data are based on *secondary information* and *primary information*. *Secondary information* used in the thesis is indirect interpretations made by the author, of the reality being studied, based on the theories and previous results presented in Chapter 3. Based on the assumptions in Kolb's ELT framework, the author has interpreted it as useful to use its theoretical foundation and introduce the metaphor of *national preference of learning style* by using Hofstede's dimensions *power distance* and *uncertainty avoidance* to explain the phenomena under study. In Arbnor and Bjerke's (2009) systems approach, this type of technique is described as the use of a metaphor as a methodological procedure, which contributes to better describe the picture of the reality. In science, this entails that the creator of knowledge takes a concept from one situation, and transfer the characteristics to be used in another and different situation. Thus, the concept of *preference of learning style* has been taken from the ELT framework, where it is used on the individual level, and transferred it to be used in a cross-cultural comparative-analysis on the national level and in a multinational team context. Hence, being the thesis purpose to contribute to the identified knowledge gap in the literature, by introducing a new perspective of the concept preference of learning style on the national level. Further, a complementary procedure in the development of the thesis theoretical framework has been undertaken, meaning that interpretations made by other researchers are based on a different methodological approach than the systems approach. However, when incorporating these through the use of methodological procedure in line with the systems approach, is argued, not affect the validity of the research. (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009)

Primary information used in the thesis' research is *direct observation*, deriving from the authors own experiences of living in each of the countries, respectively Germany and Mexico. Direct observations are thus subjective interpretations based on observations and reflections of behavioral characteristics of the two collective groups however such interpretations have its theoretical foundation from the theories presented in Chapter 3.

Research Process

The overall process of developing the thesis' conceptual framework has been influenced by circular methodics – where the applied methodological procedures described above have throughout the research been modified and at some point in the process been replaced. Due to the rather broad perspective in the body of the research, the conceptual framework has undergone several modifications however the broad perspective is viewed as a rich contribution to the thesis understanding of the phenomena under study. The next section will further address the validity of the research.

2.3. Validity

The validity of a research, based on the systems approach, is described by Arbnor and Bjerke (2009, p.188) as “*connection among theory, definitions and reality – the requirement is not so much that definitions must correspond with existing theory or be operational, as that they are perceived to be important and relevant to the creator of knowledge...*” (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009, p.188). The process of the knowledge creation in this thesis, has a theoretical focus of explaining, and creating a broader understanding of how *national preference of learning style* influence a multinational team's functional processes and performance. This is done by introducing the phenomena under study as a metaphor, which contributing to develop a system reality view from a new perspective then what have previous been done.

The *means* and methodological procedures applied in the thesis are viewed as being relevant in connection to the phenomena under study. Limitation is however present and reflected over in Chapter 7.

This chapter has served as the thesis methodological framework where the thesis methodology and research design have been presented. The methodological framework connects the used theories, presented in Chapter 3, to the methodological view undertaken and links it to the area under study.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

Multinational organizations today structure their functioning across-borders, and the use of multinational team as a resource is an important function to reach strategic objectives (Deresky 2000). This leads to an increased need of understanding and knowledge about functioning of multinational team as a resource to be utilized– how people with different nationality and cultural background, which think differently, can use their abilities consciously and create synergy when working together (Hofstede, 2001).

Being the purpose of this thesis, to contribute to the knowledge gap identified in the literature by creating new knowledge of the functioning of multinational teams, more specifically – the phenomena of *national preference of learning style*, to explain and gain an understanding of the influence it has on multinational team’s functional processes and performance. Hence, the intention of this chapter – a theoretical analysis of the application of the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984) and Hofstede’s Cross-Cultural Framework (1984, 2001), to the concept of *national preference of learning style* and its influence on a multinational team’s functional processes and performance.

The ELT provides the thesis with an understanding of the concept *preference of learning style*. In a learning process, human beings adapt their past experiences to fit new circumstances – this process, argued by Kolb (1984) occurs by adapting to a preferred learning style. Adaptation occurs when an individual transform past experiences to fit new circumstances. In the theoretical framework of the ELT this process is influenced by an individual’s inherent experiences, past life experience and demands of its present environment (Kayes et al 2005a). Hofstede’s (1984, 2001) cross-cultural research and development of the multidimensional model of national culture, has identified national culture as a component of individuals’ *mental programming* – patterns of behavioral characteristics of a collective group (Hofstede, 2001).

Deriving from the ELT framework, the learning process is influenced by an individual’s inherent experiences, past life experience and demands of its present environment – Kolb’s (1984) ELT and Hofstede’s (1984, 2001) Cross-Cultural Framework can contribute to the thesis understanding and development of the concept of *national preference of learning style*.

This chapter serves as the general, theoretical foundation for the development of the thesis theoretical model – however when connected to the thesis methodological framework, will serve as a technique, through the application of methodological procedure in the development of the thesis overall conceptual framework (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009).

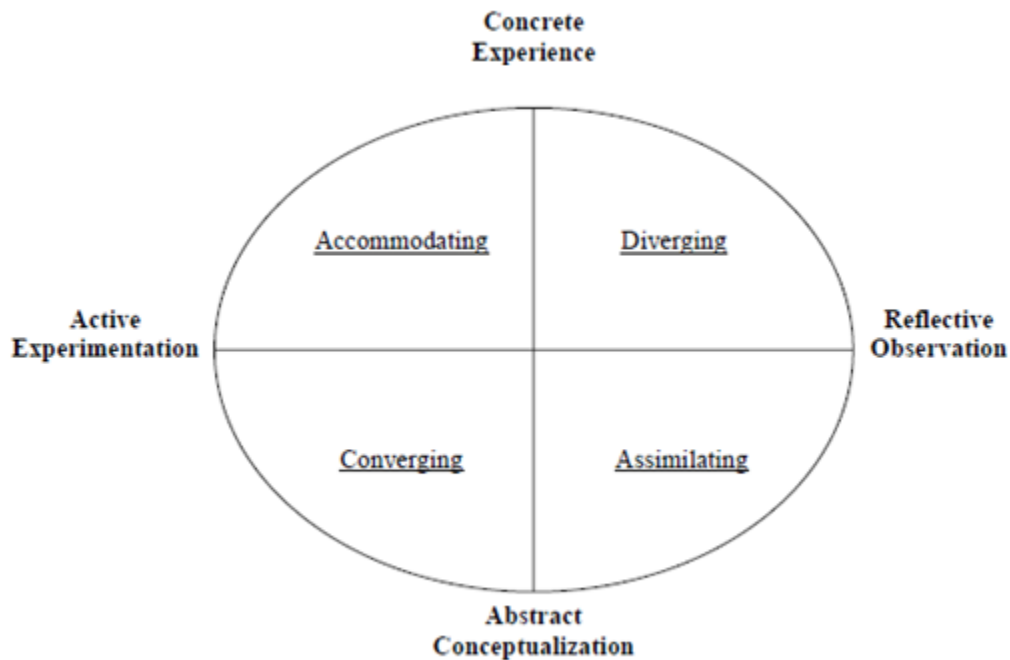
3.2. Experiential Learning Theory

The ELT provides a holistic model of the learning process and development – how individuals learning process’ evolves when adapting their past experiences and abilities to fit new circumstances. *Experiential learning* is a continuous process whereby an individual’s past experiences, influence the perception and adaptation to new circumstances. The process of learning occurs as transaction between the individual and its environment, whereby past experiences evolves and creates new knowledge, attitudes and abilities. (Kolb, 1984)

3.2.1. The Experiential Learning Model

The Experiential Learning Model (Kolb, 1984), illustrated in Figure 3 under, represents the process of experiential learning. Experiential learning is defined by the ELT as “...*the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience – Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming it*” (Kolb, 1984, p.41). Kolb (1984) argues that the model represent a conflict between different modes of how an individual deals with its surroundings, and grasps experiences. This conflict is illustrated in Figure 3 through the vertical dimension of dealing (grasping) an experience – *Concrete Experience* and *Abstract Conceptualization*, and the transformation of experiences, presented in the horizontal dimension – *Reflective Observation* and *Active Experimentation*.

Figure 3: The Experiential Learning Model and Basic Learning Styles



Source: Kayes et al (2005a, p.334)

Even though, the two dimensions of grasping and transforming experiences are polar opposites – learning occurs to be most effective when learners have the ability to touch all four stages as a learning cycle – “*That is, they must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences (<Concrete Experience>). They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives (<Reflective Observation>). They must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories (<Abstract Conceptualization>), and they must be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (<Active Experimentation>)*” (Kolb, 1984, p.30). According to Kolb’s learning cycle a concrete experience becomes the basis for the second stage – observation and reflection. Observations and reflections are then adapted into general abstract concepts which further experiences, such as new knowledge, skills and attitudes can evolve by testing them out in practice (Kayes et al, 2005a).

However, polar opposite abilities cannot function side-by-side, and in a learning situation the learner must choose the abilities that suit the particular situation. The experiential learning model, presents us with a choice of how to grasp and transform experiences – however an individual cannot grasp an experience by acting out a concrete experience and conceptualize the experience at the same time, as well as transformation cannot act out by reflecting and acting directly at the same time. Hence, this conflict is resolved by choosing how to act in a certain experiential situation – which has been suggested by Kolb (1984) to occur based on our own perception of the world and how we adapt to our environment. The perception and adaptation of how we go about learning are based on preference – throughout our life we develop our own way of resolving tasks which we are faced with, and the way of choosing is grounded in our inherent experiences, past experiences and the demands we are faced with from our environmental contexts (Kolb, 1984 and Kayes et al, 2005a).

The choice between the concrete or abstract grasping, and between active or reflective adaptation, are argued by several (e.g. Kolb, 1984; Kayes et al, 2005a; Kayes et al, 2005b) to entail some characteristic ways of choosing – these are called *learning styles* in the framework of ELT (Kolb, 1984). The four learning styles developed in the ELT by Kolb (1984), illustrated in Figure 3 above, are *the diverging-, assimilating-, converging- and accommodating learning style* (for detailed description, see Appendix 2). The individual behavioral characteristic of the four basic learning styles are based on qualitative research on the individual level and therefore explaining how an individual goes about grasping and transforming his or her experiences. However, the learning assumptions in Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model have their foundation based on qualitative research and therefore transferable to provide a holistic understanding of the functioning of teams– how they create awareness of the team's learning process and national learning styles within a multinational team context.

Further, developing team-awareness of how the team goes about learning, has been suggested by Kayes et al (2005a) to have synergic effect on team performance. The forthcoming section will tie the assumptions in the learning process of the ELT framework to a team context and presenting the research results by Kayes et al (2005a, 2005b).

3.3. Experiential Learning in Teams

Kayes et al (2005a) argues that a team's learning process is an essential aspect of a team's functioning, and by consciously focusing on the team's ability to learn from their experience, it can facilitate team development and performance. Further, Kayes et al (2005a) suggests that a team learn differently in the early stages of development versus the later stages, and that experiential learning is the key component to understand aspects of team process development.

Team development and the development of team skills are suggested to facilitate a team's actions in their attempt to adapt and respond to their surroundings (Kayes et al, 2005a). By intentionally and consciously focus on the process of learning in a team – Kayes et al (2005a) have identified six functional aspects of team development and learning – *purpose, membership, role leadership, context, process* and *action*. These six functional aspects will be elaborated in the forthcoming section.

3.3.1. Team Process Functioning

The functioning of team development are viewed as a dynamic process of learning, by applying experiential learning principles to the six functional aspects of team learning – *purpose, membership, role leadership, context, process* and *action*, team performance can be improved and facilitate the development of team skills (Kayes et al, 2005a).

Team development is thus a process whereby group dynamic (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000) evolves and facilitates higher level of performance by consciously applying the ELT's learning assumptions. Higher level of performance is viewed as the process where a team develops team skills by learning from their past experiences, and creates new knowledge, attitudes and abilities. The concept of *group dynamic*, deriving from Kayes et al (2005a) research is an important aspect of an experiential approach to team learning, and they have identified three components which facilitate the development of group dynamic, which are *conversation space, role leadership* and *the process of team development*. By further develop the thesis understanding of group dynamic,

an explanation of the six functional aspects of team development will be elaborated (Kayes et al, 2005a).

Purpose, as a functional aspect of team learning refers to as the shared purpose of a team, guides the team and their actions in order to meet the demands set by their organization. Shared purpose is an important aspect of the functioning of a team, since this is the foundation for their actions, without a purpose there are no need for a team to work together. In the early stage of team development, team members use time to get to know each other, however individual goals and expectations are more dominant than a shared, mutually understanding of the team purpose. The coherency of the team needs time to develop, and in the early stage of development they need to focus on developing a shared team purpose, suggested by Kayes et al (2005a, p. 342), the team ought to learn about:

- Each other in order to develop an understanding of the individual members needs and goals
- The team's shared purpose
- Developing an alignment between individual goals and the team's purpose

In this early stage, the team adapts to its environment by providing what is expected of them – as far as it is possible, they respond directly to the tasks given to them through actions fulfilling the goal of the task given. However, by time and through the development of the team's shared purpose, they will act more in coherency and be more independent from their environment. As a team, they may now be able to redefine their team's purpose and respond more actively to opportunities and challenges introduced by their environment. Suggested by Kayes et al (2005a, p.342) this later stage of team development focused more on learning about:

- Coherency in their purpose as a team
- Redefining their goals to better respond and adapt to their environmental context
- Developing their team dynamic – empowering the team

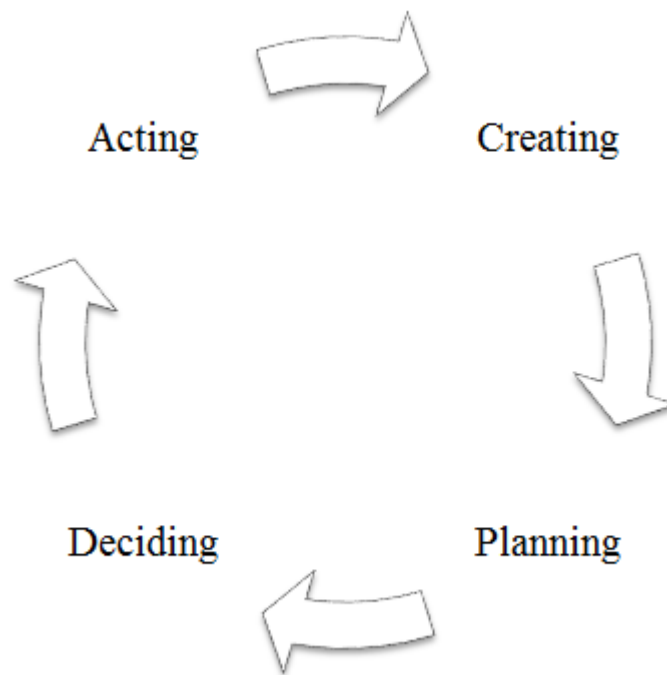
As mentioned above, this development of a team's shared purpose from an early to a later stage is facilitated by developing a coherency in group dynamic. Kayes et al (2005a) advocates that creating a *conversational space* promotes an empowering and motivational force which facilitates the team to redefine their adaptation to their environment by redefining and develop their goals. A conversational space encourages the team to consciously go through the learning cycle – share their individual expectations in early stages of team development as a *concrete experience* – by developing trust and mutually respect, their understanding as a team, and themselves as individuals fosters a space for *reflective observation*. Reflective observation occurs by talking about their expectations, which in return may be aligned into rules and norms (*abstract conceptualization*) of mutually expectations of individual- as well as the group's development. These shared expectations can now be actively tested (*active experimentation*) – and evolve into creation of team skills, which again goes through the learning cycle and evolve as more refined. Further, creating a conversational space would also prevent the development of dysfunctional team behavior, such as *social loafing*, *groupthink*, *overdependence of a dominant leader*, *overcommitment to goals* and/or *diffusion of responsibility* (Kayes et al, 2005a, p. 331). Social loafing is a characteristic of individualistic behavior, where an individual do not accomplish his part of the task assigned to him in the thinking that someone else in the team will accomplish the task, whereas on the other hand groupthink is dysfunctional team behavior (Thomas and Inkson, 2003). Groupthink becomes dysfunctional when the team creates an atmosphere of agreeing upon e.g. a decision, action etc. without further reflection of alternatives – their consensus upon the matter excludes innovativeness, which often occurs when teams develops groupthink.

Membership, as a functional aspect of team composition are – “...*team size, expertise, learning style, and the ability to manage differences and similarities among team members...*” (Kayes et al, 2005a, p.343). Learning about membership is especially important, as viewed from a cross-cultural perspective as in this thesis – highly national heterogeneous compositions of team members in teams can be a potential hinder in developing a dynamic team culture (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). Dysfunctional team behavior, as referred to above, can be a potential strong force to be overcome in national heterogeneous teams, nevertheless much of the literature advocates a potential enhancement of performance level in such teams (e.g. Kayes et al, 2005a, Earley and Mosakowski, 2000).

Invisible cultural differences (Hofstede, 1984) or for that matter “tangible” differences are often an origin for dysfunctional behavior in teams. Nevertheless, the potential of synergy and innovativeness in highly national heterogeneous team is higher, as for teams with a moderate national heterogeneous or homogeneous team composition (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). As the team learns and develops their perception of team membership, the potential synergy is argued to affect the performance level of the team in a positive direction. Learning and developing a consciously awareness, includes to develop and value the differences of individual member’s knowledge, attitudes and skills – has the potentiality of enhancement on team effectiveness on performance, even in apparently national heterogeneous teams. Kayes et al’s (2005a) research suggest that a heterogeneous team compositions are more likely to have individuals with spread preference of learning style, which based on the ELT (Kolb, 1984) would contribute to more effective performance, since the team has abilities which touch all the four stages in the learning cycle.

Role leadership, as a functional aspect of team development is how a team delegates team roles by members adapting their abilities to the team environmental circumstances. The team’s process development, or the functioning of a team through the view of experiential learning – team roles evolves by “*organize <the team> as a system that can adapt to and ultimately master its context*” (Kayes et al, 2005a, p.345). As the team’s dynamic culture evolves, different role adaptations will be improved in the team’s work processes, since they know each other’s abilities and have developed a coherency of perception of their team purpose. Adaptations to team roles are thus influences by learning styles and learning stages. The four learning stages are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Learning Circle



Source: Based on Kayes et al (2005b, p. 358)

The first stages in Figure 4 is *creating* and is compatible with the *diverging learning style*, team member roles dominating here are those who have skills, and abilities to *imagine new possibilities and alternatives and recognize problems*. The second stages is *planning* and is compatible with those of the team's members having the preferred *assimilating learning style*, team roles needed in this stage relates to *organizing information, creating models and theories, and defining objectives*. The third stage *deciding* is compatible with the *converging learning style*, team roles dominating are those who have skills and abilities to *solve challenges, are good at taking decisions and setting goals*. The last stage, the *acting* stage are compatible with the *accommodating learning style* and team roles related to *getting things done, take action and risks, and getting support*. (Kayes et al, 2005b)

Team member's role *"is determined by personal characteristics such as personality, preferences, skills, and expertise and by environmental demands such as the expectations of other team members and task requirements"* (Kayes et al, 2005a, p.345). As the team moves through the different stages in the learning cycle team roles shifts – when the members of the team have evolved their team skills and developed as a team, they will learn to adapt to their environmental circumstances. In the early stage of a work task, a member with the skills and abilities compatible with *creating* stage will lead this particular stage, whereas other members will take over the leadership in the next learning cycle stages. This dynamic process of role leadership is argued by Kayes et al (2005a) to enable the team to avoid dysfunctional team behaviour and enhance team performance by utilizing the team member's abilities – knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Context, as a functional aspect of a team's development – the team context surrounding, such as the resources available and individuals working with the team, influences and is being influenced by the team and how they go about solving their work tasks. Deriving from the dynamic view of Kayes et al (2005a) whom describe the team contextual environment as an evolving force – in the early stages of a team's development they will in short just respond and act in order to solve a specific work task as being expected of them. However, the team context will developed parallel with their group dynamic and role leadership, which influence their control over their team purpose and more effectively adaptation to their environment. Effectively adaptation to their environment entails, for example how the team goes about to utilize their members' abilities and adaptation of roles, based on preferred learning style, when acting upon their environmental demands. Kayes et al (2005a, p.348) have organized a team's environmental demands into four holistic dimensions:

- Interpersonal demands: *"aspects of the task that require working together with members of the team and with other individuals and teams that affect its purpose."*
- Information demands: *"the information and knowledge essential for achieving the team's purpose."*
- Analytical demands: *"the ability of the team to analyze, synthesize, and form a coherent picture of what the team faces and the information it has available."*

- Action demands: “*identifying the skills, deadlines, and tasks that must be completed by the team.*”

Applying experiential learning principles in the process of a team’s development can, as mentioned above, facilitate the team’s performance and hinder dysfunctional team behaviour, by actively take a part and learn from its environment and reach the team purpose.

Process, as a functional aspect of a team’s development is in this thesis understood through the ELT by Kolb (1984). The experiential learning model, illustrated in Figure 3, provides the thesis with a conceptual understanding of team process functioning. The development of how teams learn to utilize their abilities can be improved by providing an understanding of the functioning of a team – the ELT framework provides a description of experiential learning, in relation to team development when used consciously can contribute to develop team effectiveness.

Action, as a functional aspect of a team’s development is the process of how a team achieves its purpose (Kolb 1984). As in the first stage of the learning cycle, illustrated in Figure 4 above, reflective observations over the team’s actions, facilitated by a team’s conversational space – gives the team the opportunity to reflect over their processes, develop new approaches and refine their actions. In the early stage the team may not have a throughout developed perspective on their purpose as a team, but in a later stage an awareness of their actions are grounded in experiential learning and how they adapt to their team context.

3.4. Hofstede Cross-Cultural Framework

Geert Hofstede’s (1984, 2001) cross-cultural IBM-based research developed a multidimensional model of national culture, which has contributed to explain the complex concept of culture on the national level. This research has been seen as a paradigm shift, where it became possible to explain the complexity of the concept culture and explain cultural similarities and differences in cross-culture analysis between nations (Minkov and Hofstede 2011).

Primary, Hofstede’s framework describing national culture has contributed to an explanation of national statistical differences between nations, whereas before differences on a national level

were explained by referring to as being “differences in cultural backgrounds”. However, “culture” was here explained by using it as a single variable, while Hofstede (1984) argued that national differences in behavior could be better explained by the use of the dimensions of national culture. Further, Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture have contributed to the phenomena of culture by explaining cultural similarities and differences across nations. However, many researchers have conducted studies using Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture to explain cultural similarities and differences on the organizational level or the individual level, such a method cannot be used as a predictor for organizational or individual behavior. The reasoning being that Hofstede’s results are statistically valid on the national level, whereas his attempts of verifying the statistical results on the organizational level and the individual level turn out not to be statistically valid results. Hence, the predictions of behavioral characteristics are to be used to predict general behavior on the national level when comparing at least two nations in an analysis to predict cultural similarities and differences. The most known and used contribution of Hofstede’s framework is the multidimensional model of national culture, where patterns of behavioral characteristics of collective groups (nations) identified five dimension providing an understanding of the component national culture. The multidimensional model address basic problems that all societies somehow needs to resolve, and how collective groups perceive and adapts to these basic problems can be predicted through comparison by using the five dimensions described under: (Hofstede 1984, 2001)

- *Power Distance*: The extent of acceptance of unequal distribution of power – human inequality as the degree of power distance in the functioning of a society.
- *Uncertainty Avoidance*: Perception and adaption to uncertainty aspects of the future.
- *Individualism versus Collectivism*: Positioning of collective groups on the dimension – relating to individualistic or collectivistic integration into groups.
- *Masculinity versus Femininity*: The extent of emotional role distribution between genders – masculine or feminine values in the functioning of a society.
- *Long- versus Short-Term Orientation*: Ridged or loss time-management – in different aspects of the functioning of a society.

Deriving from the ELT framework's factors influences preference of learning style on an individual level, it is described by factors such as inherent experiences, past life experience and the demands of the present environment. Whereas inherent experiences can be explained by Hofstede's framework (1984) being the "mental programs" which people are carrying with them in the functioning of social systems. Social systems are argued by Hofstede to be social functioning based on the predictability of the behavioral characteristics of human beings, which Hofstede refers to as *mental programs*. The mental programs have different levels of understanding by predicting behavioral characteristics which can be analyzed on different levels – the universal-, the collective-, and/or the individual level. Hofstede (1984) argues that individual mental programs are developed early in the childhood, which are then reinforced and developed throughout the life, in contact with different social context such as schools and organizations. These individual mental programs does however contain a component which Hofstede refers to as national culture – listed above as the five dimensions of national culture as being *Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism and Collectivism, Masculinity and Femininity, Long- Versus Short-Term Orientation*. By abstracting the predictable behavioral characteristics on the national level, referred to as the collective level, Hofstede has developed a method to assess the predictability of behavior between collective groups – which is to be used in the thesis cross-cultural comparative-analysis entailing a comparison of cultural differences in relation to the concept of *national preference of learning style* between Germany and Mexico on the national level.

The framework of Hofstede's research has had highly influence on the cross-cultural management thinking, and contributed to increased understanding of similarities and differences of national cultures (Minkov and Hofstede 2011). An increased understanding of cultural similarities and differences, have increased the understanding of how culture influences organizational behavior and practices, by predicting behavioral characteristics on the national level. Whereas, the ELT framework addresses preference of learning style on the individual level, the thesis purpose are to explain national preference of learning style on the national level. In order to do so the thesis adapts the understanding of mental programs as explained by Hofstede's framework and the multidimensional model of national culture as a method to assess national preference of learning style. This will contribute to increased understanding and

knowledge of predicting general behavioral characteristics of adaptation of learning style on the national level.

Based on the thesis purpose and phenomena under study an assessment of the five dimensions of national culture were conducted, to determine which of them where to be used in the thesis comparative-analysis between Germany and Mexico. During the last several decades cross-cultural studies have been conducted based on Hofstede's dimension of national culture. The dimensions identified in the literature, as being most descriptive when predicting organizational behavior in comparative-analysis between nations on the national level are *power distance* and *uncertainty avoidance* (Hofstede, 2001). These dimensions provides and understanding of the social functioning in organizations on the national level. Deriving from these mentioned issued the forthcoming section will elaborate the two chosen dimensions *power distance* and *uncertainty avoidance*.

3.4.1. Hofstede's Multidimensional model of National Culture

Hofstede (1984, 2001) has identified five dimensions of national culture that contributes to the thesis understanding of the concept *national preference of learning style*. However, the dimension used in the thesis' analysis are the dimensions *power distance* and *uncertainty avoidance*. As mentioned, the five dimensions presented are not all equally important to explain the phenomena under study in the thesis therefor the two latter mentioned dimensions will be elaborated here in this section of the theoretical framework undertaken in the thesis.

Hofstede (1984, 2001) measured both general and work-related values, related to similarities and differences between national cultures, which is presented as a comparative score index on each of the dimensions of national culture - the concept of *values* in his framework is defined as "*a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others*" (Hofstede, 2001, p.5). This is described in Hofstede's framework as being the dominant value systems, the statistical patterns identified have been organized, and contributes to predict the general behavior by comparing nations' thinking, feeling and acting on the national level.

The Dimension of Power Distance

The dimension of *power distance* refers to issues of how societies handle differently the power distribution of human inequality, which is reflected in the extent of acceptance of the unequal distributions in status, prestige, wealth, and power (Hofstede 2001). However, in organizations there is somewhat the issue of the extent of expected human inequality in the power distribution – where the functional structures of the organization are somehow predictable through the formalization and structuring of relationship between colleagues.

Hofstede (2001) measured, in the IBM study, different values on the national level entailing tendencies and preferences on the power distance index (PDI) in organizations. The values reflected in the power distance related to organization on the PDI measured to what extent subordinates perceived the fear of disagreeing with their superiors, the preference of decision-making style of their superiors, and the preferred decision-making style of their superiors (Hofstede 2001, p.79). Even though, the index does not reflect only the work-related values, but also general values – Hofstede resolved this by integrating them into what is referred to as a “power distance norm” mirroring the overall power distance values held by the middleclass in the represented countries in his studies (Hofstede 1984, 2001). The main concept in the power distance dimension is *inequality*, in organizations this is reflected as the unequal distribution of power. Hofstede argues that in order for an organization to function according to its purpose, it is essentially to have unequal distribution of power. This distribution can be described as being formalize as, for example in an egalitarian structure or hierarchical structure. Nevertheless, one form or opposite form of structure, there will always be an unequal distribution of power based on the subordinate versus superior. The mental programming or value systems are influenced by objective facts and subjective factors, which determines the relationships between subordinates and superiors. (Hofstede 2001)

The Dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance

The dimension of *uncertainty avoidance* refers to issues of the extent societies’ programs their member’s emotional relations to the future – where the future can be perceived through values of how to cope with the uncertainty, and the perception if it uncontrollable or controllable.

However, in organizations there is the issue of the extent of being uncomfortable or comfortable in unfamiliar situations, and the perception of how to cope with the future by utilizing the resources at hand. (Hofstede 2001)

Hofstede (2001) measured, in the IBM study, different values on the national level entailing tendencies and preferences on the uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) in organizations. The values reflected in the uncertainty avoidance related to organization on the UAI measured rule orientation, employment stability, and stress (Hofstede, 2001, p.145). Rule orientation reflects how organizations cope with short-term versus long-term uncertainty, and organizations cope with this uncertainty by utilizing technology, rules and rituals. Rules as to eliminate the uncertainty of employment stability and stress, by somehow try to steer and predict behaviorism. Whereas rituals has two purposes – social as well uncertainty avoidance, where the latter in form of religious rituals serve as a way of coping with the uncertainty of the future, whereas social purpose serves as binding a collective group together. The index reflects values of how to cope with time, future, uncertainty and anxiety – through technology, law and religion (Hofstede, 2001, p.146). Hofstede refers to technology as to all the resources humans are surrounded with, by protecting us from causes caused by nature. (Hofstede, 2001)

Deriving from above mentioned issues related to the theoretical overview of the ELT, technology in Hofstede's framework can be argued to be the transformational dimension in the experiential learning model – whereby humans development evolves by how we transform the resources surrounding us into new knowledge, abilities or skills. Law is referred to as how to cope with uncertainty of others behaviors, whereas religion reflects the values of how to explain or understand the unknown. The main concept in the power distance dimension is *uncertainty* and how humans from different nations cope with this – how they transform earlier experiences in order to meet the uncertainty in the future. (Hofstede 2001)

3.5. Summary

This chapter has analyzed the application of the theory Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb 1984) and Hofstede's Cross-Cultural Framework (Hofstede, 1984, 2001) to the phenomena of *national preference of learning style* to be applied in a multinational team context.

After screening the literature related to learning style theory, based on an extensive literature review conducted by Cassidy (2004), Kolb's ELT is the learning style theory was found to be the most relevant to explore and apply in relation to the thesis purpose. The ELT framework differentiates itself from other typical learning theories, such as pure *cognitive learning theories* or *behavioral learning theories*. The latter, does not include subjective experience as significant for the learning process, whereas this is to be argued is the foundation of ELT – where subjective experience is described as being the force of learning and how we as human beings evolve and develop, by learning from our past subjective experiences. Cognitive learning theories on the other hand focus are on learning as a pure analytical process in the mind of humans, the process being based on logical thinking and the assumption that we choose to learn what is the best for us. (Kolb, 1984, Kayes et al, 2005a)

The thesis has adapted the subjective view of learning from the ELT framework, which is compatible with the methodological view applied in this thesis research. Further, the experiential learning model's assumptions are to be argued, compatible with Hofstede's multidimensional model of national culture. More precisely, the grasping and transformation of experiences of individuals are seen in the ELT has being influenced by inherited experiences, past life experience and demands of its present environment. Inherited experiences have been suggested above to be compatible with Hofstede's concept of mental programming of collective groups. National culture being a component of such mental programs which, argued by Hofstede can predict behavioral characteristics of collective groups and be used in the thesis' cross-cultural comparative-analysis. Hence, the thesis' conceptual framework has its foundation and understanding deriving from Kolb's (1984) ELT framework and the research conducted by Kayes et al (2005a, 2005b) of experiential learning in multinational teams, further the understanding of the concept *national preference of learning style* is developed by applying Hofstede's (1984, 2001) cross-cultural framework.

The forthcoming section will present the thesis theoretical model, based on the general, theoretical overview presented in this chapter. The components and factors identified, is a mean to theoretical explain the metaphor of *national preference of learning style*, and the relations between them is illustrated in Figure 5 Theoretical Model – National Preference of Learning Style.

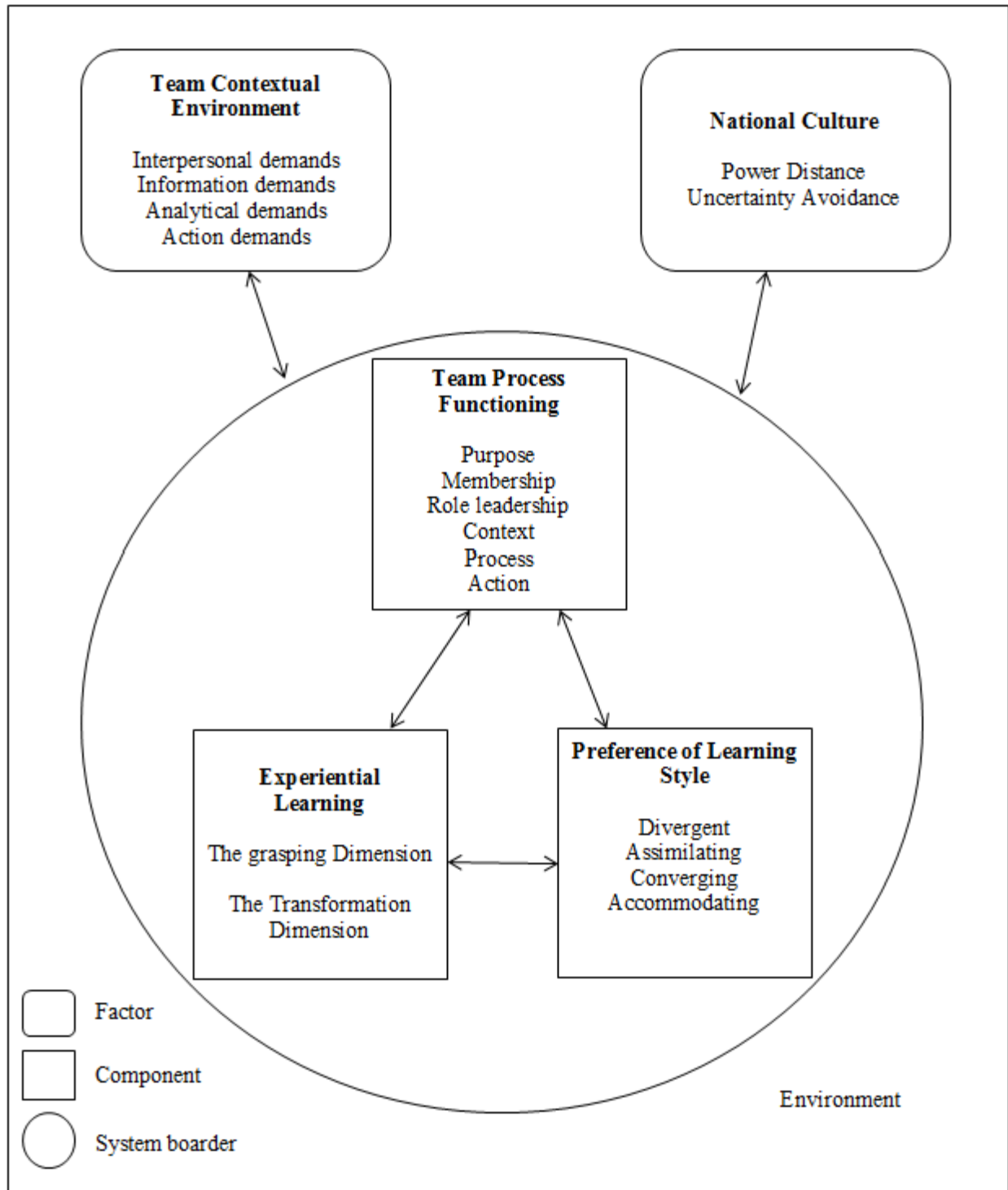
2.6. Theoretical Model

This chapter analyzed the application of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, Kayes et al's (2005a, 2005b) research and Hofstede's (1984, 2001) multidimensional model of national culture to the concept of *national preference of learning style* and its influence on a multinational team's functional processes and performance. The theoretical analysis has developed the thesis theoretical framework, by clarify, distinguish and identify components and factors, and the relationship between them, which ought to facilitate the theoretical explanation of the phenomena under study – how national preference of learning style influence multinational team's functional processes and performance.

This section, will presents the theoretical model developed, the identified components and the factors, and their relations will be summarized and explained. The theoretical model, illustrated in Figure 5, will be used in the thesis contextual analysis, presented in Chapter 4 as a method to facilitate the analysis and contribute to a more holistic understanding of the phenomena under study.

The theoretical analysis conducted has identified the components *team process functioning*, *experiential learning*, and *preference of learning style*, and the factors *team context environment* and *national culture*. Both identified factors *team contextual environment* and *national culture* influences the identified components in the theoretical model. The thesis' theoretical model, illustrated in Figure 5 under, serves to provide a theoretical explanation of the phenomena under study.

Figure 5: Theoretical Model – National Preference of Learning Style



Source: Own creation based on Kolb (1984), Kayes et al (2005a, 2005b) and Hofstede (1984, 2001)

Team Process Functioning

Deriving from the theoretical overview of the ELT framework and experiential learning in teams, the thesis has identified the concept of *functional processes* in the aspect of multinational team as being the functioning of a social system. The functioning of a social system is here understood as a *dynamic process* of team development, entailing the understanding of a team's relations to components evolves over time.

Further, the functioning of a social system is understood through Hofstede's (1984, 2001) framework where members of social systems are argued to carry *mental programs*, which have patterns of predictability in behavioral characteristics of human beings. Members of a nation is seen as a collective group, where patterns of predictable behavioral characteristics have been statistically proven in Hofstede's studies, by viewing national culture as a component of collective groups mental programming. These patterns can be used in a comparative-analysis to predict general cultural similarities and differences at the national level.

The component identified which can contribute to the thesis explanation of the phenomena under study is *team process functioning*, which entails six different aspects of team functioning – *purpose, membership, role leadership, context, process* and *action* (Kayes et al, 2005a).

The concept of *functional processes* has contributed to the thesis conceptual understanding and identification of the component *team process functioning*. The component identified is interrelated to the components *experiential learning* and *preference of learning style*, and is influenced by the factors *team contextual environment* and *national culture*.

Experiential Learning

Deriving from the identified component *team process functioning* described above, an explanation of the component *experiential learning* is required. The thesis understanding of *experiential learning* is based on the ELT's definition as "...the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience – Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming it" (Kolb, 1984, p.41).

As mentioned above, the components *experiential learning* and *team process functioning* are here closely interrelated – the dynamic process is seen as the team development over time in the component *team process functioning*, and in order to understand and explain this development the thesis has adapted the view of Kayes et al (2005a) – and identified the component *experiential learning* as contributing to this understanding. The latter component entails *the experiential learning model* derived from the ELT. *The experiential learning model* describes how the experiential situational contexts are being *grasped* and *transformed*. In order to create new knowledge, attitudes, and skills a team needs however to go through four stages in Kolb's (1984) *Experiential Learning Cycle*. It is understood that the learning process a team goes through evolves, by developing team skills – new knowledge, abilities and attitudes, which takes the team to a higher level of performance.

Preference of Learning Style

The concept *preference of learning style* deriving from the ELT framework entails the experiential learning model, which provides the thesis with an understanding of how individuals choose to grasp and transform experiences. How experiences are grasped and transformed is understood as a process of tension, and conflict, and is influenced by how individuals perceive the world and adapt to their environmental contexts. It is argued that how an individual perceives and adapts are influenced by their hereditary equipment, past experiences and the demands faced by the environmental contexts. This tension- and conflict-filled process of grasping and transforming experiences is solved by adapting to a preferred learning style – the four basic learning styles identified in the ELT framework are *divergent-*, *assimilating-*, *converging-* and *accommodating learning style*.

The perception of preference of grasping and transforming experiences has been transferred to Hofstede's understanding of people's mental programming on the national level. Mental programs are argued by Hofstede to entail the component *national culture* which can contribute to predict behavioral characteristics on the national level.

The component *preference of learning style* is influenced by the factors *team contextual environment* and *national culture*, and interrelated with the components *team process functioning*

and *experiential learning*. From a holistic perspective the functioning of a team is viewed as the functioning of a social system, therefore it is possible from a theoretical perspective, using Hofstede's multidimensional model of national culture to predict behavioral characteristics on the national level in the thesis's analysis. However, it is important to emphasize the importance of the dynamic process view undertaken in the holistic understanding of the thesis' theoretical as well as conceptual model. The dynamic process and the development of learning affect the component *preference of learning style* which influences the factor *national culture*. Deriving from Hofstede's framework it is possible to predict general behavioral characteristics and therefore, assumed here in this thesis, *national preference of learning style* of collective groups on the national level. The dynamic process of experiential learning in collective groups facilitate creation of new knowledge, attitudes, and skills – this learning development influences “predictable behavioral characteristics”, whereby “new” sets of “predictable behavioral characteristics” dominates in a later stage of team development.

National Culture

The concept *national culture* derives from Hofstede's cross-cultural framework, which is seen as a component of a collective group's mental programming. As mentioned above, suggested to be compatible with the ELT's description of how people perceive the world and adapt to the environmental contexts. The thesis' comparative-analysis can therefore be conducted on the national level, by comparing the broader tendency of preference in national values between Germany and Mexico.

Deriving from the multidimensional model of national culture in the framework of Hofstede, the two dimensions *power distance* and *uncertainty avoidance* were identified. These are suggested to predict the formalization and centralization of the functioning in organizations, where Figure 5 presented in Chapter 3, facilitate the thesis' analysis by giving an understanding of cultural determined differences between the two nations.

Team Contextual Environment

Deriving from Kayes et al (2005a) research on experiential learning in teams, the concept of *environmental context* is understood as the immediate environment, surrounding a team, such as the resources available and immediate teams or colleagues working directly with the team. The dynamic process view undertaken in the conceptual model provides the thesis with the understanding of how the factor *team contextual environment* evolves over time – how a team goes about its work tasks influences and change the environmental context as the team learns and develops. Deriving from Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory the thesis has developed an understanding of the concept *performance* as connected with the component *team contextual environment*, whereby the concept *performance* in teams is understood as short-term adaptation to the component.

Kayes et al (2005a) have suggested four holistic dimensions of a team's environmental demands, respectively *interpersonal demands*, *information demands*, *analytical demands* and *action demands*. Connecting the factor *team contextual environment* to the components – especially with the component *team process functioning*, which describes how role preference of team members are manage, and matched in order to solve environmental demands faced by the team. Conscious awareness of the component *team process functioning* facilitates the team's experiential learning process and the development of team skills, which guides the team by refine or redefine their approaches when facing environmental demands.

The factor *team contextual environment* has an active force in the relation to the component *team process functioning*, when actively focusing on learning and how the team adapts to its contextual environment, higher level of performance can be achieved, dysfunctional team behaviour avoided and facilitating accomplishment of team purpose. (Kayes et al, 2005a)

2.6.1. Theoretical Considerations

A multinational team is seen as a unit of an organization entailing members from a specific or multiple collective groups, argued by Hofstede (2001) such units can be compared in a cross-cultural comparative-analysis and predict behavioral characteristics between team members on the national level. The reasoning behind this logic is that such are seen upon as symbolic units, where the functioning and meaning of such are entailed in the mental programming of its members. These mental programs, as mentioned earlier entail a component of national culture which makes it possible to predict behavioral characteristics on the national level.

There are theoretical considerations in relation to studying the phenomena of culture, which needs to be clarified in order to conduct a comparative-analysis between nations, based on cultural differences and values between collective groups on the national level. First, the assumption that national culture rarely changes radically in the short space of time (Hofstede 2001). A radical change of behavioral characteristics on the national level of a society is argued by Hofstede to entail a strong force from nature or human being. The latter being radical changes such as, for example conquest of a nation where the behavioral characteristics changes due to extreme influence of the force, whereas nature can cause radical change of behavioral characteristic through dramatic change of climate or diseases. Secondly, deriving from the assumption that national cultures rarely changes makes it possible to study differences of the pattern of behavioral characteristics of collective groups, valid to be used in a cross-cultural comparative-analysis. The reasoning being that a specific collective group at a given point in time shares specific behavioral characteristics, which differentiate them from other collective groups (Gullestrup, 2006).

The cross-cultural perspective undertaken in this thesis is reflected in the cross-cultural comparative- analysis conducted on the national level, presented in chapter 4, between Germany and Mexico. The two collective groups are being compared through the thesis theoretical model, where the general, theoretical foundation is presented in Chapter 3.

The phenomena under study in this thesis is the general social functioning of a multinational teams in a multinational organizations context – from that point of view it is more valuable for the thesis cross-cultural comparative-analysis to focus on the *power distance* and *uncertainty*

avoidance dimensions of national culture. These dimensions explain best cultural differences and similarities in the aspect of functioning of organizations. However, worth mentioning the two selected dimensions have to be view as being interrelated to all of Hofstede's dimensions presented in his multidimensional model of national culture. (Hofstede, 2001)

This chapter has theoretically analyzed the application of the theories Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb 1984) and Hofstede's Cross-Cultural Framework (Hofstede, 1984, 2001) to the phenomena of *national preference of learning style*. The thesis cross-cultural comparative-analysis will contribute to theoretically explain and determine the two collective groups' preference of learning style on the national level. Further, the analysis will contributed to develop a more holistic understanding of how *national preference of learning style* influences multinational team's functional processes and performance.

4. Cross-Cultural Comparative-Analysis

Deriving from the previous chapter where a theoretical explanation was developed, through the thesis theoretical model, illustrated in Figure 5, this chapter will present a cross-cultural comparative-analysis between Germany and Mexico. The previous chapters have contributed to theoretical determine the relation between the identified components and factors. The ambition of this chapter is to gain a broader understanding of the concept *national preference of learning style* and how it influence a multinational team's functional processes and performance. The analysis has its foundation in the theoretical model presented in Figure 5 which ought to facilitate the analysis, and contribute to develop a broader understanding of the phenomena under study.

The forthcoming sections will present the analysis of the three identified component in the thesis conceptual model, respectively *team process functioning*, *experiential learning* and *preference of learning style*. The analysis is based on the reality assumption of a holistic, complex, and dynamic picture of the object under study – in a multinational team context composed by equal many members from Germany as Mexico. The analysis does not aim at scrutinizing the data on a detailed level, but on the general level – with the aim to contribute to a new holistic perspective in relation to the identified knowledge gap in the literature. Further, the analysis presented here is influenced by the thesis methodological choice of approach, meaning that the components and factors are interrelated and therefore must throughout the analysis be viewed in a holistic perspective of the conceptual model, presented in Figure 5.

However, as the thesis research design, presented in Figure 2, illustrates the research process is influenced by circular methodic – given the business reality under study, a better picture and understanding will evolve throughout the chapter's analysis. This new understanding will be presented in a new developed conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 9, in the end of the chapter.

4.1. The Component Team Process Functioning

Kayes et al (2005a) argues that a team can develop and increase their performance by consciously integrate the ELT's learning process view – to develop the team's skills by consciously learn from past experiences. When a team consciously focuses on the team's learning process, members can develop team skills, which may facilitate their actions and how they cope and respond to specific environmental demands. Further, Kayes et al's (2005a) study identified learning as the key component of six functional aspect of team development – *purpose, membership, role leadership, context, process and action*.

Group dynamic is an important factor of influence on a team's functional processes, by creating awareness and mutual understanding of cultural differences, through an experiential approach to team development, functional processes and team performance can be enhanced. Deriving from the interpretations made by Earley and Mosakowski (2000) in their research on team culture, group dynamic is understood and referred to in this thesis as – *coherence in team interaction*. Hence, over time a team develops a set of rules and norms, mutual expectations of individual's development as well as the group's development, which fosters a coherency between the team members, by acting similarly, based on their shared set of values and meanings they have developed over time as a team.

The creation of new team skills is understood as a dynamic process which develops over time, which entails the awareness of the team's experiential learning process and group dynamic. The component *team process functioning* has been identified as an important aspect of creating an understanding of a team's functional processes, where group dynamic is an important factor influencing the functioning of a team.

Hofstede's two dimensions *uncertainty avoidance* and *power distance*, the interpretation of group dynamic deriving from Earley and Mosakowski, and the three components of group dynamic which has been identified in the literature by Kayes et al (2005a) – *conversation space, role leadership and the process of team development*, in connection with the six functional aspects, will be the foundation for predicting behavioral characteristics and team's group dynamic. Hence, the forthcoming section's analysis will develop a hypothesis, predicting group

dynamic between team members from Germany and Mexico, based on their predictable national behavioral characteristics.

Conversation Space

In a multinational team context constructed of members from Germany and Mexico there are cultural differences in their values which influences the team's conversational space, which are important to address in order to avoid dysfunctional team behavior. Conversational space, deriving from Kayes et al's (2005a) research is interpreted in the thesis as an open and active dialog entailing exchange of team experiences between the members, where the team actively reflects and makes sense of their development as a team. The development of such a conversational space in the focal multinational team context can take longer time to evolve, because of potential cultural differences, the forthcoming paragraphs will compare such differences in relation to the six functional aspects of team functioning.

In the development of team *purpose* members from Germany may perceive their team's objectives as developing strict business relationships by highly formalizing and structuring team activities. Through efficient collaboration between members work tasks are often divided, where it is the individual's responsibility to accomplish the objectives of the specific task, whereas members from Mexico prefer a more collective collaboration and approach of dividing work tasks. Mexicans perceive a team's objectives as developing a team atmosphere by approaching and solving work tasks as a group by dividing work tasks and responsibility on the team as a whole. Both approaches are specific ways of dealing with their low tolerance of uncertainty – where the uncertainty is reduced by setting social norms and rules as a foundation of how their activities should be conducted.

Based on own observations I would explain this approach of dividing work task as being an *individualistic approach* versus a *collectivistic approach*. Where members from Germany reduce their uncertainty by introducing strict social norms of behavior through norms and expectations of performance on an individual and personal level, members from Mexico introduce norms on a collective level in order to hinder dysfunctional team behavior. The individual- versus collective approach of dividing work tasks can be explained through Hofstede's dimension of *uncertainty*

avoidance, where members from a specific collective group has high or low tolerance for uncertainty – Germany and Mexico have respectively scored an index of 65 and 82 (see Appendix 3) (Hofstede 2001, p.500). Both nations has therefor members in their collective group with low tolerance for uncertainty, which by introducing social norms and rules, tries to reduce and/or eliminate the perceived uncertainty in their *team contextual environment*.

However, their preferred approaches to reduce uncertainty in their contextual environment, for example, of reaching objectives or expected level of performance, are based on differences in cultural values. These values are reflected in their behavioral characteristics, where for example, members from Germany prefer strict business relationships, whereas members from Mexico prefer personalized business relationships. Strict business relationships are closely linked to a preference of reducing uncertainty by dividing the work task between members, by doing so giving each member an individual responsibility area, a social expectation of completing the task on time and with the expected level of performance. By doing so, each of the members creates a personalized connection to the task, where lack of performance or not meeting the expectations would be perceived as unprofessional. Low performance would be efficiently dealt with, where constructive personal feedback would be given in order to correct behavior, and be given as a reminder of the individual's expected performance level in the team. Such confrontations rarely occur as a personal confrontation on an individual's personality, but is rather held strictly on, and related to the professional aspects of the performance.

Whereas, members from Mexico introduce social norms of behavior and expectation on a collective level, in order to reduce their perception of uncertainty related to their *team contextual environment*. Developing personal relationships between members generates an expectation of mutual personal trust, which is perceived as insurance for work tasks to be finalized, and at the desired level of performance. However, low level of performance would not necessarily be dealt with efficiently and at on a strictly professional level such as preferred by members from Germany. Low level of performance, or not meeting expected deadline would be perceived as violation of personal trust, which has evolved between the members, often leading to a perception of violation of personal character. The confrontation of this perceived violation of trust would not necessary be dealt with directly, members from Mexico do not appreciate constructive negative feedback and would perceive this as being negative feedback of personal

character, whereas such is preferred by the German members when held on the professional level. The latter situational description relates to the *uncertainty avoidance* dimension, as to which degree members from the two focal collective groups relate to conflict and situations which makes them uncomfortable. Due to the low tolerance of uncertainty, conflicts in a multinational team context are preferably avoided in both collective groups, however when occurred they are likely to be perceived differently. Germans would handle it efficiently and strictly on a professional level, whereas Mexicans would avoid a direct confrontation and if dealt with directly, often entail a perception of personal violation on his or hers individual character.

The differences in behavioral characteristics mentioned, would have an effect on the development of a coherent perception of the team's purpose. This development is connected to the functional aspects of *membership* in a team, where the size of the team, identification of team members' abilities, weakness and strengths, and roles are interrelated and is affected by the team's group dynamic. If there is no coherency in the team's perception of team purpose, the collaboration would be negatively affected and harm the team's development – reaching a higher level of performance by adapting itself to its *team contextual environment*. This adaptation entails a positive development of utilization of the team members' abilities and skills, and resources available, when approaching their work tasks.

The functional aspects of team *membership* relates to learning about and dealing with, cultural differences and develop team skills by refine or redefine their approaches, through actively reflection of team experiences. In the focal multinational team context, members from Germany and Mexico would especially need to focus on developing an open and reflective conversational space in order to avoid dysfunctional team behavior. Based on the potential difficulties which may arise from differences in their cultural values – the perception and preference of formalization and structuring team activities. Reflecting over how the formalization and structuring of the activities will facilitate the development of a coherent perception of purpose, and hindering dysfunctional behavior as a team when faced with the team contextual environmental demands.

Role Leadership

The development of team purpose and learning about team membership facilitates the team in developing a coherent team perception and group dynamic. This is important as the team needs to respond to the demands from their *team contextual environment* – how the team goes about adapting to the environment is facilitated by developing awareness of its learning process. Awareness creates the possibilities for an open and reflective conversational space where they can refine or introduce new ways of adapting and approaching their environmental demands, which is the core of the experiential approach to team development. A multinational team composed by members from Germany and Mexico has the potential to learn from each other's cultural differences of approaching and adapting to environmental demands.

The team's adaptation entails how the members organize their roles to fit to its environmental demands – how they structure their activities in order to act and respond to these. As mentioned, German members prefer an individualistic approach, whereas Mexican members prefer a collective approach to dividing work tasks. However, in the process of learning about each other's abilities and skills in order to divide roles, the members are argued to have different preference of approaching the team's development of role adaptation.

Members from Germany would prefer an individual development of adaptation, whereas members from Mexico are more dependent on directions from superiors in their development. This statement can be theoretically explained through cultural values related to Hofstede's *power distance index* where Germany has an index of 35 and Mexico 81 (see Appendix 3) (Hofstede, 2001, p.500). The *power distance index* is here argued to have a significant influence on the functional aspects of *role leadership* – the degree of delegation of responsibility in organizations in Germany and Mexico are grounded in preferences in the two collective groups. Where Germany has a relatively low preference of unequal distribution of power in the society in general, Mexico has an index which is high – the function of their society values of expected and accepted differences in the power distribution between individuals. This is argued to have an effect on how the two collective groups perceive and goes about the process of dividing roles in a multinational team context. As mentioned, Germans would prefer an individual approach to role adaptation in the team, whereas Mexicans would prefer more guidance from team members, team leader or superiors in their role adaptation.

Team members from Germany have been exposed to organizational structures, with the preference of delegating responsibilities out in the organization, whereas Mexican members have been exposed to a structure where the responsibility lies on superiors. The latter would be argued to have significance for how Mexican members of a team would approach to role adaptation, and influences the perception of how to go about the individual- as well as the team's development. I would argue that this result in a preference and expectation of Mexican members to be leaded by other team members, especially the team leader or superiors over time – where the members would in a dynamically process develop to a certain role in the team, whereas German members would prefer to evolve into a role more individually. These differences lie in the degree of preference of individualistic- versus a collectivistic collaboration of individual development of adaptation to role in the team, and the team's development to fit these roles to respond to their *team contextual environment*.

However, as the ELT suggest the awareness of the development of the team's learning process over time will contribute to a convergence of the individual- and collectivistic view of the individual members' and the team's development. Through the learning process, the team's members as a whole will develop their own practice of feedback, encouragement of individual- as well as team development, and adaptation of roles to fit the component *team contextual environment*. To be aware of these cultural differences are important, since it does influence the group dynamic in this focal multinational team context.

The Process of Team Development

Deriving from the above mentioned cultural differences, through the comparison between German and Mexican members in a multinational team context, in relation to the functional aspects of *purpose* and *membership* in the functioning of a team – some behavioral characteristics have been identified and described. These suggestions are argued to be important cultural differences to be aware of, in the process of team development, and are listed as followed:

- *Individualistic approach* versus *collectivistic approach* related to preferences of formalizing and structuring team activities,

- *Strictly business relationship* versus *personal relationship* related to how the two collective groups tries to reduce uncertainty in their team contextual environment,
- *Individualistic collaboration* versus *collective collaboration* related to team development of adapting to the team's contextual environment,
- *Individual development* versus *collective development* related to members adaptation of roles to fit the demands from the team's contextual environment.

These mentioned differences between Germany and Mexico may contribute to team dysfunctional behavior, but by developing awareness of these throughout the learning process it may facilitate the team's development of group dynamic and take the team to a higher level of performance. Learning about the team's *context*, which the thesis has identified as the factor *team contextual environment* and how the team goes about solving these demands as an experiential learning process – whereby they will develop an understanding of the team's *processes* of adapting and solving these demands. Learning about their *process* contributes to reflections over their *actions*, which based on their team experiences can be refined or replaced by new approaches to such demands.

Deriving from the mentioned differences in behavioral characteristics above, between the two focal collective groups, the following Hypothesis I has been developed:

Hypothesis I

In the short run, a multinational team context with equally number of members from Germany and Mexico may experience implications in the development of their functional processes and group dynamic. German members would prefer to develop strict business relationships, in order to effectively formalize and structure team activities and develop team roles. Mexican members would prefer to develop personal relationships, in order to dynamically develop, formalize and structure team activities and team roles. In the long run, it is important to reflect over how the team approaches and adapts to their environmental contextual demands, reflect over their practices and refine or introduce new approaches and adaptations to their environmental contextual demands.

4.2. The Component Experiential Learning

The process of learning in multinational teams context has been identified as having an important interrelation with the development of team's process functioning. The process of learning is understood as the creation of new knowledge, attitudes, and abilities – which is theoretically explained through the ELT's experiential learning cycle. The Experiential Learning Cycle, illustrated in Figure 4, is presented here as two dimensions of how a team grasps and transforms experiences, in order to create new knowledge, abilities or attitudes when approaching and adapting to their team contextual environment. This section of the thesis will analyze these dimensions and separate hypotheses for the two dimensions will be presented, predicting the behavioral characteristics in a multinational team context by comparing national cultural values between Germany and Mexico.

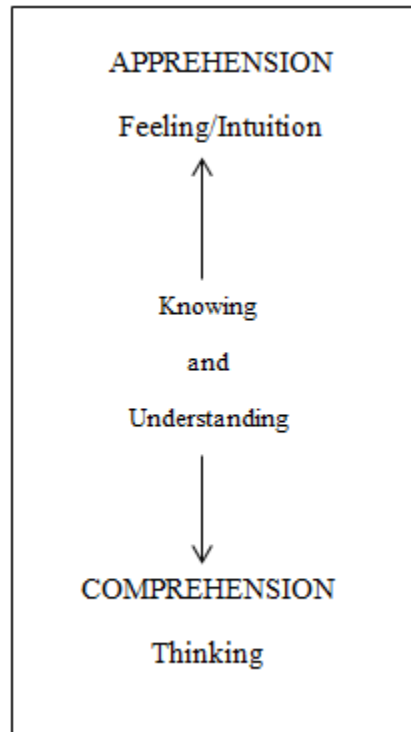
In order to analysis the preferred grasping and transformation mode on the national level by theoretical comparing members from Germany and Mexico, Figure 6 and Figure 7 presented under, must be seen in relation to the whole Figure 3 The Experiential Learning Model and Kolb's four basic learning styles. The comparative-analysis in this section focuses on predicting the behavioral characteristics which can theoretically present hypotheses of which mode in the grasping and transformation dimension on the national level Germany and Mexico prefers when going about approaching and adapting to the team's environmental context. However, this approach of analysis does not exclude the main learning assumption in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model – a team needs to go through all the stages in order to create new knowledge. The purpose is as a part of a holistic picture, to facilitate the thesis aim to theoretically explain *national preference of learning style* influences on multinational team's processes and performance. (Kolb, 1984)

The Grasping Dimension

The *grasping dimension* deals with how a team goes about knowing and understanding of the factor *team contextual environment*. How the team members' prehension of their immediate environmental contextual experiences are represented by two different modes of knowing and

making sense of the world (Kolb, 1984). These two dialectic modes are described as *apprehension* and *comprehension*, as illustrated in Figure 6:

Figure 6: The Structural Foundation of the Grasping Dimension



Source: Own creation based on Kolb (1984, p.42- 50)

The two modes of knowing and understanding the *team's contextual environment* refer to how members of the team goes about learning – how they perceive and makes sense of their environmental circumstances when creating new knowledge, abilities and attitudes.

The *apprehension mode* and the *comprehension mode* are two dialectically opposite orientations of understanding and knowing about their *team contextual environment* (Kolb, 1984). The *apprehension mode* of grasping experiences is based on feeling and intuition, where members of a collective group prefer to perceive concrete experiences in the present moment and act upon it

intuitively. This would entail acting in a situation based on an understanding and utilization of resources which not necessarily has a throughout developed rational reasoning behind it, however acting on intuition can be based on past experiences, which has been empirically verified, proven and worked out in the past. *Comprehension mode* on the other hand, is based on thinking and comprehending the situation before acting, whereas the other mode may base its understanding on what may be perceived as right, collective groups having an orientation towards the comprehension mode will put a greater emphasis in rational thinking and understanding of their environmental context before acting upon it.

Taken into consideration that both the focal collective groups in this analysis as members in a multinational team, respectively from Germany and Mexico, both have a low tolerance for uncertainty, or put in another way – collective groups with low tolerance of uncertainty prefer to eliminate or reduce their perception of uncertainty. Based on the logic presented here in relation to the two modes of grasping experiences – intuitively or rationally, I would argue that both countries have an orientation towards the *comprehension mode* of grasping experiences.

This argument is based on their preference of avoiding situations which is perceived as unfamiliar or uncomfortable. However, how they make sense and understand these situations is culturally different. Both collective groups prefer to eliminate or reduce their perception of uncertainty, as presented in the last section, the analysis suggest that Germans develop social norms of behavior by highly formalize and structure their surroundings, while Mexicans do the same only by developing social norms based on personal relationships, based on trust – both as a approach to reduce the perception of uncertainty in the functioning of their societies (Hofstede, 2001).

Based on my own observations and reflections of the two societies approaches to reduce and/or eliminate uncertainty – Germans structure their surroundings through their perception of time, which Gesteland (2002) refers to as belonging to a *rigid-time culture*, meaning that the perception of time is viewed as extremely important – to waste other peoples time is not only extremely rude, but is also perceived as being disrespectful behavior. This has contributed to their effective approach of time – where scheduling of activities, importance of meeting deadlines etc. are means to eliminate their perception of uncertainty which the future may introduce. Mexicans on the other hand belongs to as Gesteland (2002) refers to as *fluid-time*

cultures, which can be explained as being the opposite of the Germans' perception of time, however they do not belong to the most extreme fluid-time cultures. Fluid-time cultures does not differentiate between specific time for work and private affairs, as Germans do, if for example, a meeting starts after the scheduled time, Mexicans members do not perceive this as rude behavior – since there most likely is an legitimate explanation for the delay. The differences in perception of time are important to be aware of in a multinational team context, constructed by members from Germany and Mexico.

However, deriving from the mentioned issues above, Hypothesis II has developed as theoretically to determine the two collective groups' behavioral characteristic by predicting which of the two modes of grasping experience members from Germany and Mexico are orientated towards.

Deriving from both of the collective groups' low tolerance for uncertainty and mentioned behavioral characteristics Hypothesis II has been developed:

Hypothesis II

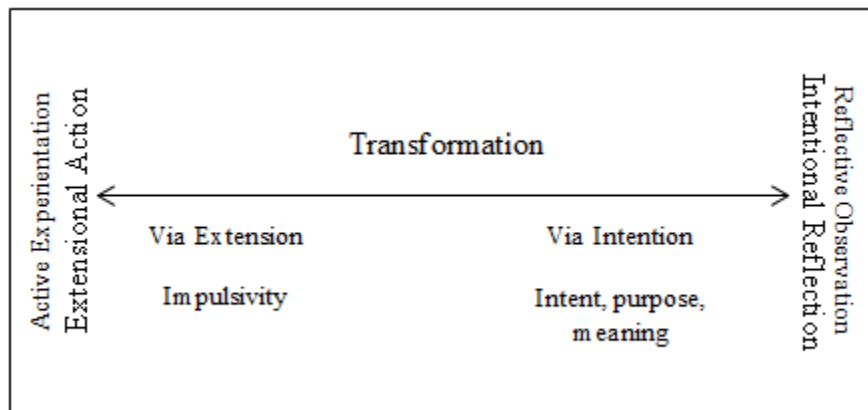
In a multinational team context, German and Mexican members would have an orientation toward the *comprehension mode* of grasping experiences. Both collective groups have low tolerance for uncertainty which predict their behavioral characteristics to base their acting, on rational understanding and assumptions about their team contextual environment.

The Transformation Dimension

The *transformation dimension* deals with a team's functions of action and coping with the factor *team contextual environment*. How team members cope with their immediate environmental surroundings when going about solving their work tasks. The transformation process is presented by two dialectic modes of coping with the factor, respectively *extension mode* and *intention mode* (Kolb, 1984). The latter mode of transforming experiences is based on reflective observation and thinking, where members prefer to take their time to reflect over the purpose and

meaning before taking a decision of action in relation to solving work tasks, which can be referred to as an orientation towards *intentional reflection*. Whereas members with an orientation towards the *extension* mode prefer to find practical solutions to work tasks which can be put into action effectively rather than spending unnecessary much time on reflecting on the purpose. The two modes of transforming experiences are illustrated in Figure 7:

Figure 7: The Structural Foundation of the Transformation Dimension



Source: Own creation based on Kolb (1984, p.42- 60)

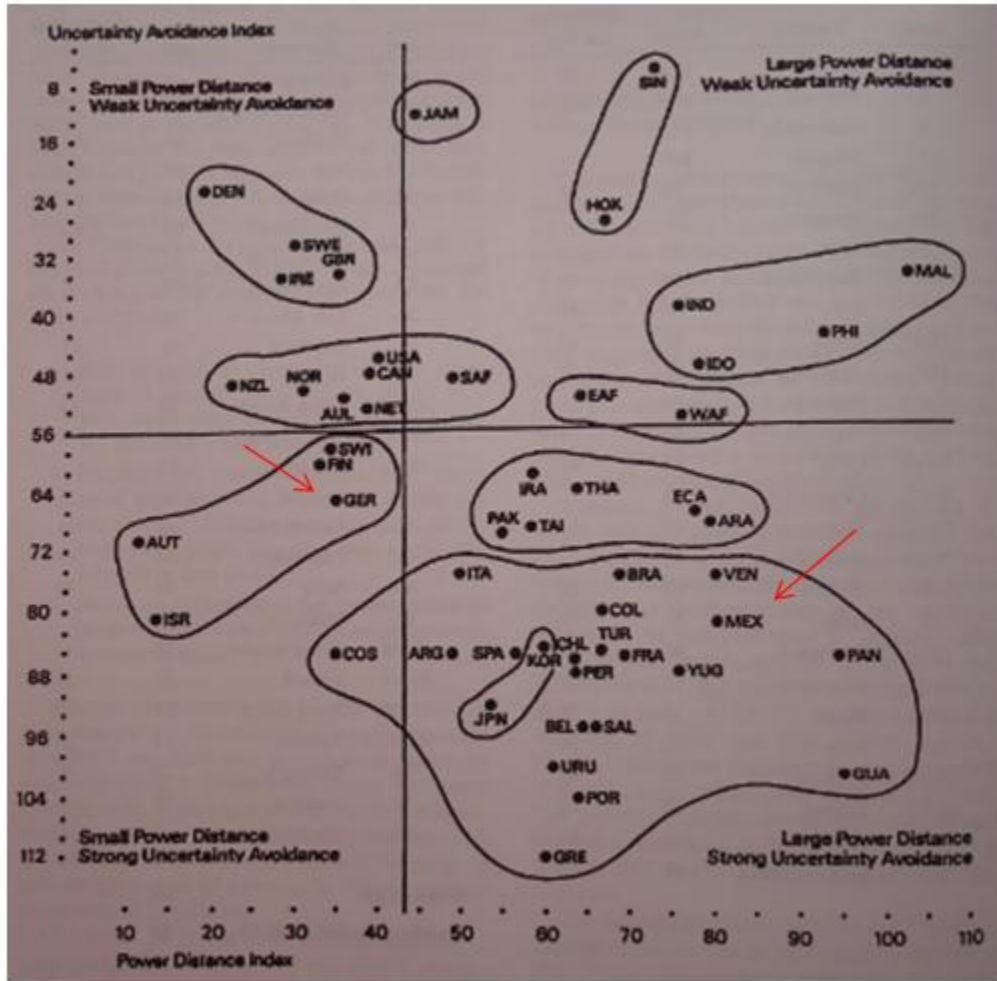
As illustrated in Figure 7, members of a team can have an orientation towards *intentional reflection* or *extensional action*. Members' orientations have been argued to have a solid foundation and influence from their past experiences and national values. The forthcoming paragraphs of this section will compare Germany and Mexico in relation to the transformational dimension and the factor *team contextual environment* to theoretical compare their values by using Hofstede's dimensions *uncertainty avoidance* and *power distance* of national culture. A comparative-analysis of cultural differences in their values can contribute to predict the transformational orientation of the two collective groups.

The transformational orientations *intentional reflection* and *extensional action* are dealing with how members prepares themselves for action or proceed to solve a work tasks in relation to handle the demands introduced by their work environment.

Hofstede's *uncertainty avoidance* dimension relates to the functional aspects of an organization and the organizations formalization and structuring of their activities, whereas the *power distance* dimension relates to the structural aspects of an organization and the degree of centralization and decentralization of authority.

Deriving from Hofstede's (2001) research it has contributed to an increased understanding of the functioning of organization when comparing collective groups on the national level, through a combination of the *uncertainty avoidance index* and the *power distance index*. Hofstede has suggested that these two dimensions are the most significant when analyzing the functioning of organizations on the national level. Illustrated in Figure 8 under, Hofstede has organized a UAI x PDI plot for 50 countries, where the functioning of organization has been organized and gives an increased understanding in the analysis comparing Germany and Mexico. Figure 8 gives the foundation for predicting the behavioral characteristics on the national level between the two collective groups, which facilitates the analysis of their orientation towards *intentional reflection* or *extensional action* mode of transforming their *team contextual environment*.

Figure 8: The Functioning of Organizations – A UAI x PDI Plot for 50 Countries



Source: Hofstede (2001, p.152)

The vertical dimension representing the UAI, can be seen as the functioning aspects of an organization, how organizations formalize and structure their activities. Whereas the horizontal dimension representing the PDI, can be seen as the structure aspects of an organization, how the functioning of an organization is structures, the degree of centralization or decentralization of authority. Centralized structure is organized by the decision-making from the top and implemented downwards, whereas decentralization spread their authorization of decision-making out in the organization.

As the Figure 8 illustrates, Germany is in the down left quadrat, however positioned in the upper right corner which predict their function of organizations to be influences of a preference of behavioral characteristic of *strong uncertainty avoidance* and *small power distance*. The differences between the degree of strong uncertainty avoidance and small power distance can be described through the preference of the Germans' rule orientation. In order to reduce and/or eliminate uncertainty, as mentioned earlier, they introduce social norms of rules and expectation of behavior in order for their society to function. These social norms, rules and expectations are however stronger than the authority of an individual, meaning they in themself are not influenced by a specific individual who dictate them. On the other hand, Mexico is in the down left quadrat, positioned somewhat in the middle which predicts their functioning of organizations to be influenced of a preference of behavioral characteristic of *strong uncertainty avoidance* and *large power distance*. In their rule orientation this means that an individual, perceived in the Mexican society of being in a powerful position, will influence dictation of social norms, rules and behavioral expectations. As mentioned earlier, the thesis hypothesize that Mexican members would prefer to develop personal relationships, in order to dynamic develop, formalize and structure team activities and team roles – which is linked to their preference of authority in the functioning of organizations. (Hofstede, 2001)

Figure 8 above can be seen as a map of how organizations functions, whereas Table 1 under describes the differences in the functioning of organizations among the quadrants in Figure 8.

Table 1: Significance of the UAI x PDI for the Functioning of Organizations

<p>4 Small power distance Weak uncertainty avoidance Countries: Anglo, Scandinavian, Netherlands Organizational type: implicitly structured Implicit model of organization: market</p>	<p>1 Large power distance Weak uncertainty avoidance Countries: China, India Organizational type: personnel bureaucracy Implicit model of organization: family</p>
<p>3 Small power distance Strong uncertainty avoidance Countries: German-speaking, Finland, Israel Organizational type: work-flow bureaucracy Implicit model of organization: well-oiled machine</p>	<p>2 Large power distance Strong uncertainty avoidance Countries: Latin, Mediterranean, Islamic, Japan Organizational type: full bureaucracy Implicit model of organization: pyramid</p>

Source: Hofstede (2001, p.377)

The significance of the UAI x PDI as listed in the above Table 1 explains differences in the functioning of organizations, as illustrated in the four quadrants of Figure 8 above. Power distance is related to the above mentioned issues, especially in relation to the functional structures of the organization, whereas uncertainty avoidance in organizations deals with the perception of how to cope with future by utilizing the resources at hand – how organizations structure themselves in relation to the power distance index.

While the two quadrants on the right hand both are described with strong uncertainty avoidance, they differ in organizational type, respectively *personnel bureaucracy* and *full bureaucracy*. Where the latter is related to the uncertainty avoidance index and to the degree of how strict the rule orientation is in the prescribed work process of an organization, whereas personnel bureaucracy is the degree of the prescribed relationship between subordinates and superiors. The respectively quadrants on the left both share small power distance, but differ in the UAI – *work-flow bureaucracy* has high prescribed work processes, but low degree of unequal distribution of power between subordinates and superiors, whereas quadrant one does has low prescribed work process and low degree of power distribution.

Deriving from Hofstede's (2001) research, Figure 8 and Table 1, the functioning of organizations in Germany and Mexico can be categorized into respectively quadrat 3 and 2 in Table 1. Quadrat 3 and 2 differs as mentioned above in the different perception of rule orientation between the two focal collective groups, which influences their preference of organizational type in the aspect of organizational function. German organizations in comparison to Mexican organization are described as *work-flow bureaucracy*, deriving from the previous section – German organizations formalize and structure their activities based on strict formal social norms, rules and behavioral expectations, however due to low orientation towards the significance of power distribution in their society, which leads to an adaptation to their surroundings, described as an *individualistic approach* whereas Mexican adapts to their surroundings described as a *collective approach*.

The *individualistic approach* of preference in relation to the transformation dimension reflects that German members in the focal multinational team context would prepare themselves for action in an effective manner – proceeding to solve a work task by highly formalizing and structuring their work environment through the resources they have available. They would prefer to focus on the work tasks and develop effective professional relationships in order to act upon the team contextual demands. The *collective approach* however in the relation to the transformational dimension of experiences has a preference of preparing themselves to act upon the demands through personalized relationships, where the perception of time is an important aspect – Mexican members would prefer to develop personal trust, which evolves over time. This orientation of preparing oneself for action or procedure for solving a task would be described as an orientation towards the *intentional reflection* – where it is preferred to reflect over the intention, purpose, and meaning when going about facing the demands from the *team contextual environment*. Such an orientation described as the preference of Mexican members can be described as an efficient orientation, whereas German members would prefer to act through an effective orientation or be oriented toward the *extensional action*.

Deriving from the differences in combination of uncertainty avoidance index and power distance index and mentioned behavioral characteristics as individualistic approach and collectivistic approach, Hypothesis III has been developed:

Hypothesis III

In a multinational team context members from Germany will have an orientation towards *extensional action* and Mexican members an orientation towards *intentional reflection* when transforming experiences. The latter predicting a preference of reflecting over intention, purpose and meaning of the action before efficient acting, whereas extensional action predicts a preference of direct and effective acting.

4.4. The Component Preference of Learning Style

Deriving from the above mentioned hypotheses this section of the thesis will develop a hypothesis based on the predicted collective group's behavioral characteristics, which can describe Germany's and Mexico's *national preference of learning style*.

There are several characteristics shaping and influencing the preference of a learning style. The ELT's framework entails characteristics influencing the individual preference of learning style – the preferred way for a person to grasp and transform its experiences when adapting himself to his immediate environmental circumstances. This is a sufficient method when assessing and identifying the preference of learning style on the individual level, whereas the purpose in this thesis is an analysis on the national level. Hence, the thesis analysis has adapted the view use by Kolb (1984) – where adaptation of learning style is influenced by a person's preferred way of adapting to its immediate environmental circumstances, and has combined it with Hofstede framework's (1984) view of how people adapt to its immediate environmental circumstances on the national level.

Through the hypotheses II and III it have been predicted that members from Germany would have an orientation towards the *comprehension mode* of grasping experiences and *extensional action* of transforming their experiences, whereas members from Mexico share the same orientation towards the *comprehension mode* of grasping experiences, but differs in their orientation of transforming their experiences with an orientation towards *intentional reflection*. Further, deriving from Hypothesis I members from Germany would prefer an *individual development*, whereas members from Mexico would prefer a *collective development* of adapting

themselves to team roles to fit the demands from their immediate environmental circumstances – or as identified in the thesis as the factor *team contextual environment*.

Adaptive competencies are described in the ELT's framework to entail factors influencing how individuals go about solving a specific task or problem in its immediate environmental surroundings. Through the hypothesis I it has been predicted that members from Germany and Mexico would experience some difficulties in the beginning of collaboration in a multinational team context, which would influence their early developments in the team's functional processes. These difficulties have been suggested to relate to their different degrees of *individualistic*-versus *collectivistic approach* of formalizing and structuring team activities, *individualistic collaboration* versus *collective collaboration* of team development and adaptation to its immediate environmental surrounding, and *strictly business relationship* versus *personal relationship* of reducing uncertainty in their team contextual environment.

Deriving from the Hypothesis I, II and III predictions of preferred behavioral characteristics on the national level between the two collective groups, respectively Germany and Mexico, Hypotheses IV predict in a multinational team context, members from Germany having a preference of the *converging learning style*, whereas members from Mexico having a preference of the *assimilating learning style*.

Hypothesis IV

The national preferences of learning style for members in a multinational team context – members from Germany will have a preference of the *converging learning style*, whereas members from Mexico will have a preference for the *assimilating learning style*.

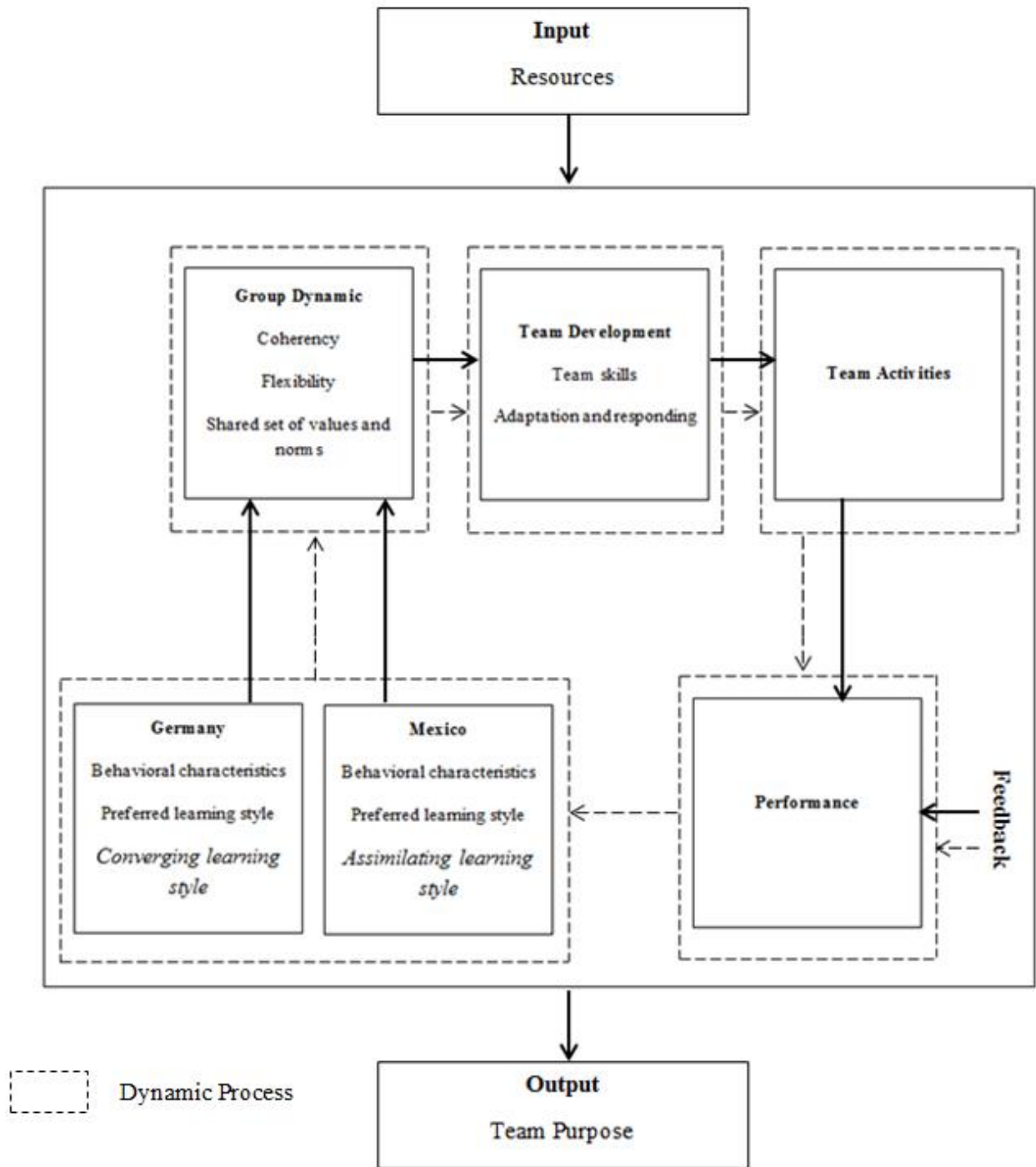
4.5. Conceptual Model

The hypotheses in the former sections of this chapter, have predicted that members from Germany and Mexico, respectively have the *converging learning style* and the *assimilating learning style* as national preference of learning style. The thesis theoretical model has been applied as a method to describe the collectives groups' *national preference of learning style*. The understanding of *national preference of learning style* in the overall conceptual framework of the thesis derives from Chapter 3, where the basic assumptions of how one goes about grasping and transforming experiences have been connected with Hofstede's multidimensional model of national culture.

However, the thesis ambition has further been to gain a broader understanding of how the metaphor of *national preference of learning style* influences a multinational team's *functional processes* and *performance*. The metaphor of *national preference of learning style* has been integrated in the conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 9 under, which described a holistic and complex picture of the reality of a multinational team composed by members from Germany and Mexico. Throughout the chapter a broader understanding of the metaphor's influence on the multinational team's functional processes and performance has developed.

As illustrated in the conceptual model under, the general functioning of a team entails *behavioral characteristics*, *group dynamic*, *team development*, *team activities* and *performance*. These mentioned components create the system border of a multinational team. Further, *input* entails the resources available for the team to be utilized in order to develop as a team. *Output* is the development of a team's purpose, which is here understood as entailing the team's synergy effect when learning about their general functional processes and the potential for the team to excel. Even though, and especially a multinational team, is measured for their result of performance – the synergy effect lies within the team, and influences the outcome, where they excel when they have reach control over their team purpose.

Figure 9: Conceptual Model – National Preference of Learning Style



Source: Own creation

Gaining control over team purpose entails the development of being a self-organizing system and creating abilities to change or redefine team activities, actions, approaches and behavior through the mechanism of feedback (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2009). This is a dynamic process entailing the awareness of how the team goes about grasping and transforming their immediate environment.

Influence on Functional Processes

The concept of *functional processes* in a multinational team context has been identified in the thesis theoretical framework as the component *team process functioning* – a dynamic process of team development facilitated by the team's *group dynamic*, which guides and steers the team's adaptation and responding to its immediate work environment. The component entails six functional aspects of team functioning, and is understood through the ELT's theoretical framework, which explains the influence preference of learning style has on a team's learning process.

A team's learning process is the development and creation of new knowledge, attitudes and abilities – the *team development* of team skills, which ought to facilitate the team's adaptation and utilization in relation to their *team contextual environment*. Through the development of the team's skills it has been suggested that the team's group dynamic influence *team development* – the team's group dynamic and *team development* will facilitate and guide the *team activities* to reach a higher level of performance. Higher level of performance in a multinational team context means that the team has developed awareness over its learning process through learning and developing their experiences. Where reflecting over their approaches/experiences when faced with *team contextual environmental* demands contribute to redefine or develop new approaches of reaching the team's purpose.

The development of *team skills* is a dynamic process, which develops over time – group dynamic will facilitate this development throughout the team's development, however coherency of team functioning is a prerequisite, entailing coherency of team purpose, rules and norms. A positive development of a team's group dynamic leads to its members acting similarly, based on their shared set of values and meanings they have develop over time, which guides and steers the

team's actions. However, a negative development of group dynamic, where team members cannot collaborate together, as mentioned earlier may introduce dysfunctional team behavior, such as *social loafing*, *groupthink*, *overdependence of a dominant leader*, *overcommitment to goals*, and/or *diffusion of responsibility*.

Deriving from the thesis analysis's comparison of the collective groups, Germany and Mexico, it has been detected several differences in cultural values or behavioral characteristics, such as the degree of preferences related to formalization and structuring of team activities, reduction of uncertainty, perception of individual- and group development, and adaptation to the *team contextual environment*. Such cultural differences are important to be aware of in a multinational team context, because of its influence on the team's functional processes of adapting and responding to contextual demands – *interpersonal-*, *information-*, *analytical-*, and *action demands*.

Interpersonal demands are influences by the team's coherency in their interactions, meaning the processual development of collaboration between the members in the team. The interaction or development of group dynamic, between German and Mexican members in a multinational team context has been suggested to be influenced by the *individualistic approach* versus *collectivistic approach* of formalizing and structuring activities. German members would prefer to structure team activities, by developing *strict business relationships* with focus on an effective approach to fulfill team criteria and its purpose – this entails dividing work tasks as individualistic responsibility areas. Mexican members would prefer to structure team activities by developing *personal relationships*, based on trust in order to reduce the uncertainty of team outcome – entailing division of work tasks as being collectivistic responsibility. Further, it has been suggested that German members have a preference of *individualistic collaboration*, whereas Mexican members have a *collective collaboration* when adapting to the team's contextual environment, which relates to the difference of *individual development* versus *collective development* related to members' adaptation of roles to fit the demands from the team's contextual environment. The differences of approaching the process of dividing work tasks can be a source of dysfunctional team behavior, however as suggested by Kayes et al (2005a) by intentionally focusing in the teams' learning process, they can develop their own team coherency of approach to formalize and structure activities in relation to the team's purpose.

Information demands are influenced by how the members go about grasping and transforming their immediate work environment – utilization of the resources available to the team in order to achieve the team's purpose. Hypothesis II predicted both collective groups of having an orientation toward the *comprehension mode* of grasping experiences – entailing low tolerance for uncertainty, the preference of acting based on a rational understanding and assumptions of the resources available. However, there were different orientation on the transformation dimension members from Germany are oriented toward *extensional action*, whereas members from Mexico are oriented towards *intentional reflection*. Thus, making the German members focused on maximizing success – effective acting with little concern about failure or error, whereas Mexican members would primary try to avoid failure and error through an efficient acting (Kolb, 1984). Deriving from the issues mentioned above, the members preferences would influence *analytical- and action demands*. German members would effectively approach work task's, with minimum loss of time in order to act and respond to demands, whereas Mexican members would think and reflect to create a coherent picture of the purpose and meaning of their action before responding upon the demand(s).

Creating awareness and flexibility of the different behavioral characteristics which differs of German members from those of Mexican members in a multinational team context, will facilitate group dynamic and team development, and positively influence functional processes.

Influence on Performance

Deriving from hypothesis IV it have been predicted that members from Germany prefer a *converging style*, whereas Mexican members prefer *assimilating learning style* to grasp and transform team experiences.

The converging- and the assimilating learning style have both different definitions of successful performance (Kolb, 1984). Both the collective groups have as suggested different perception and preference of grasping and transforming their experiences – they act and think differently in relation to performance. This is reflected in the ELT as being the constant tension and conflict between the modes in the experiential learning model. German members cope with the environmental circumstances by approaching challenges and opportunities effectively, focusing

on transferring ideas to be used in practical situations and base their decisions or solutions on practical reasoning. Desired level of performance is reach based on effectiveness, planning of goals and deadlines, whereas Mexican members prefer to cope with the environmental circumstances by approaching challenges and opportunities efficiently, entailing analyzing information available by developing a throughout rationality of the purpose before acting or reaching a decision.

Through the ELT, performance is viewed as the short-term outcome of acting out team activities, whereas the synergy of reaching higher level of performance lie in the development of team purpose. When the team consciously focuses on, and creates awareness of the team's learning process, members can develop team skills, which may facilitate their actions of how they cope and respond to specific team contextual environmental demands. Through consciously learning from their experiences a team can increase its awareness of team purpose and increase the quality of its performance.

Through the development of team purpose and learning from earlier experiences, knowledge and skill used in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follows. This learning process can be viewed as a learning spiral, where former experience develops and redefines how the team adapts and responds to its surroundings.

5. Discussion of findings

The developed theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 has been used as a method to gain a broader understanding of the learning process in a multinational team context composed by members from Germany and Mexico. What can be drawn from the general findings in the cross-cultural comparative-analysis on the national level, is that creating awareness and encourage learning of how cultural differences of values, preference of national behavioral characteristics, in multinational team contexts influences a team's functional processes and performance.

The influence of national learning style, meaning how a collective groups goes about grasping and transforming contextual team experiences, have been suggested to have an impact on the development of group dynamic – which further influence team development, team activities and performance. The preferred behavioral characteristics of how to go about learning from experiences has been argued to be influenced by collective groups programming – where the component national culture is argued to be a force influencing national preference of learning style of team members.

Further, cultural diversity in a multinational team context may equal cultural synergy, where mutual learning from each other's preferred national learning style may enrich the team's development and increase team performance. It is not the same as saying that the multinational encounters between different collective groups are without obstacles. A multinational team may meet dysfunctional team behavior caused by cultural differences, which needs to be dealt with, which require additional time when a team is composed by two or more collective groups.

Earley and Mosakowski (2000) conducted a study of the implications of team composition on group dynamic. Their study concluded that the development of a coherent, mutual shared group dynamic was positively related to higher level of team performance. However, successful development was more evident in homogeneous and highly national heterogenic teams, whereas moderate national heterogenic teams were more exposed to dysfunctional team behavior and implications. According to Earley and Mosakowski (2000) implications may occur due to communication problems, interpersonal conflict and lower team coherency, which negatively

influences a team's functional processes and expectations of performance' set by the organization.

Following the result of Earley and Mosakowski (2000), a moderate national heterogenic team composed of members from Germany and Mexico may have additional implications due to the nature of their team composition. Their research pointed out implication of interpersonal conflict as a potential disruption of group dynamic development – the development of national depended subgroups within a moderate national heterogenic team was especially present and had negative influence on a team's functional processes and performance. However, deriving from the result of Kayes et al's (2005a) research – creating awareness of how the team goes about learning in relation to the team's six functional aspects as described in the component *team process functioning*, illustrated in Figure 5, will positively influence a team's functional processes and performance.

However, teams composed of members having balances learning styles, for example having members with preference of learning style in each of the four stages in the learning cycle – have performed better in solving complex tasks, whereas teams with similar preferences had lower performance (Kayes et al, 2005a; Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). Kayes et al's (2005a) result was argued to confirm the process perspective undertaken in the learning cycle model, as a team moves from one stage to another in the learning cycle – different members take over the control of the activities faced by the team in their immediate environmental circumstances. Kayes et al (2005b) argues that such tasks or problems needs specific corresponding set of skills – in each of the four stages in the learning cycle, illustrated in Figure 4, there are certain abilities and skills that have a more dominant role in the particular stage then others. The combination of these abilities and skills influences the outcome of solving a task or a problem, hence diversity in national preference of learning style influence performance.

Deriving from the above mentioned issues, a multinational team composed by two collective groups has greater risks of failing their team objectives, and not develop into a self-controlled systems, whereby actively influencing their purpose of existence, then a more diverse composed with all four national learning styles. In the literature, this cultural synergy effect in a multinational team referees to the potential creativity of having members with diverse preferences as contributing to solving, improving, redefining etc. team activities with ideas and

solutions from many different perspectives and angles. Worth mentioning however, is that the cultural synergy effect described occurs in teams with complex work tasks/objectives, whereas the nature of less complex work tasks/objectives does not achieve such synergy effects from national diverse team composition (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000).

However, further research is needed, to better explain the characteristics of the different *national preference of learning styles*. The thesis conceptual framework has developed an understanding and description of national learning styles, based on a comparative- procedure of other researchers' interpretations. This has been a theoretical approach influenced by the authors understanding of the phenomena under study – a theoretical analysis of the phenomena and subjective understanding of the area under study. Hence, further quantitative methods, such as developing questionnaires, which measures national preference of behavioral characteristics on the national level in multinational team contexts is needed to develop a more throughout foundation to predict national preference of learning style.

Increased knowledge and understanding of national preference of learning style provides methods which can assess the general functioning of multinational teams. General expectations on the national level of how teams, composed by diverse collective groups, goes about their work task/objectives, contributes to increased knowledge and understanding of how organizations can utilize their multinational teams by providing the right resources which ought to guide teams in reaching team excellency. As mentioned in the introduction, lack of training and awareness is the main reasons for failure of multinational teams. However, having expectations deriving solely on national predictable behavioral characteristic on the national level does not facilitate a throughout method to assess the practical aspects of multinational teams' functioning on the organizational level.

On the organizational level, a practical analysis of how a multinational team goes about its task entails analyzing the organizational processes, team activities and training, and the opportunities for optimization of such. Having general expectations of the functioning of a multinational team, contributes to create awareness and reflections over the team's experiences which develops through learning and training. Contribution of such on the organizational level provides practical methods of how organizations can use knowledge gained about national preference of learning style to positively influence functional processes and performance of multinational teams.

6. Conclusion

The overall purpose of this thesis research was to contribute to the identified knowledge gap in the literature, by introducing a new perspective of preference of learning style in a team context. The metaphor of *national preference of learning style* was introduced and indirectly interpreted as preference of behavioral characteristics of collective groups on the national level, when going about grasping and transforming team experiences in a multinational team context.

Further, the conceptual framework was developed to answer the problem formulation “*how does national preference of learning style influences a multinational team’s functional processes and performance?*”

A conceptual explanation of the influence national preference of learning style has on multinational teams’ functional processes and performance was develop through Chapter 3 and 4. The theoretical model illustrated in Figure 5 gives a holistic picture and provides theoretically a model to explain *national preference of learning style* and its influence on multinational teams’ functional processes and performance. Chapter 4 presented a cross-cultural comparative-analysis between Germany and Mexico, where the theoretical model is used in a multinational team contextual setting to further explain and gain a conceptual understanding of the phenomena under study.

Deriving from the cross-cultural comparative-analysis conducted in Chapter 4 between the collective groups, German members would prefer a *converging learning style*, whereas Mexicans would prefer an *assimilating learning style* in a multinational team context. Even though, they share the same orientation towards the *comprehension mode* of grasping the team’s contextual environment, their cultural values influence the mode. Both collective groups base their acting on rational understanding, and assumptions about knowing and understanding their environmental surroundings. However they differ in how they perceive and make sense of the team’s contextual environment.

Cultural values or preference of behavioral characteristics related to their high score on Hofstede’s dimension of uncertainty avoidance have been suggested to influence the comprehension mode. German members perceive and prefer an effective approach to time, by

reducing uncertainty through introducing social norms of highly formalized business relationships and structured activities. On the other hand, Mexican members have a more efficient approach to time, and prefer to reduce their perceived uncertainty by developing social norms based on personal relationships and trust.

On the *transformation dimension*, how German- and Mexican members deal with the team's functions of acting upon and coping (going about solving work tasks) with its contextual environment, the collective groups have respectively an orientation towards the *extension-* and *intention mode*. German members prefer to find practical and effective solutions to work task, whereas Mexican members prefer reflecting over the purpose and meaning of the task before taking action or make a decision. Both collective groups have strong uncertainty avoidance but differ in the degree of power distance, Germany has a small power distance, whereas Mexico has a large power distance influencing their preferred way of organizing and structuring their societies. It has been suggested that Mexican members prefer a collective approach of acting, whereas German members prefer an individual approach of acting and transforming their contextual environment.

The predicted preference of national learning styles of German- and Mexican members, described above, are influenced by their preferred way of grasping and transforming their experiences. However, how they interpret and perceive these preferences are influenced by their cultural values. Having certain expectations, based on national behavioral characteristics can assess and predict collective groups' national preference of learning styles, which on the theoretical level can contribute to predict expected level of cultural synergy in a multinational team. The findings in the analysis in Chapter 4, describes the national preference of learning styles influence on *functional processes* as a dynamic process of team development, facilitated by the team's group dynamic, which guides and steers the team's adaptation and responding to its immediate work environment. *Performance* is influenced by the potential cultural synergy and feedback mechanism, whereby the holistic understanding of team adaptation and responding to its environmental demands, steers and guides the team.

However, further research describing the influence of cultural values, and theoretical foundation for describing the concept of national preference of learning style are needed. As suggested, developing further methods will contribute to identify national characteristics and further

develop, describe and classify collective groups' national learning styles. On the organizational level, such classifications can be developed into practical methods, to be used in multinational team training with the focus on creating awareness of the team's learning process, and national preferences of learning styles, which positively influence a team's functional processes and performance.

7. Limitations

There are several limitations in the thesis conceptual framework due to the rather complex business reality the analysis is kept on a general level, where the holistic picture of the phenomena is in focus. This necessarily has limited the analysis to go on a detailed level, and providing specific and detailed descriptions of a multinational team. However, the objective of identifying components and factors underlying the general social functioning of a team's functional processes and performance is in line with the ambition to explain the influence of national preference of learning style from a new and holistic perspective.

Further, it can be argued that the analysis interpretation has been oversimplified and should have included more specific or explanatory factors in the theoretical framework. However, the author is aware of the complexity of the theoretical area under study, which naturally, taken the time limitation and resources available under consideration, has aimed at developing a conceptual model of the reality of multinational teams which ought to theoretically bring about a broader understanding of the phenomena of national preference of learning styles influence on a general level. This approach has been justified through the choice of methodology approach undertaken in this thesis.

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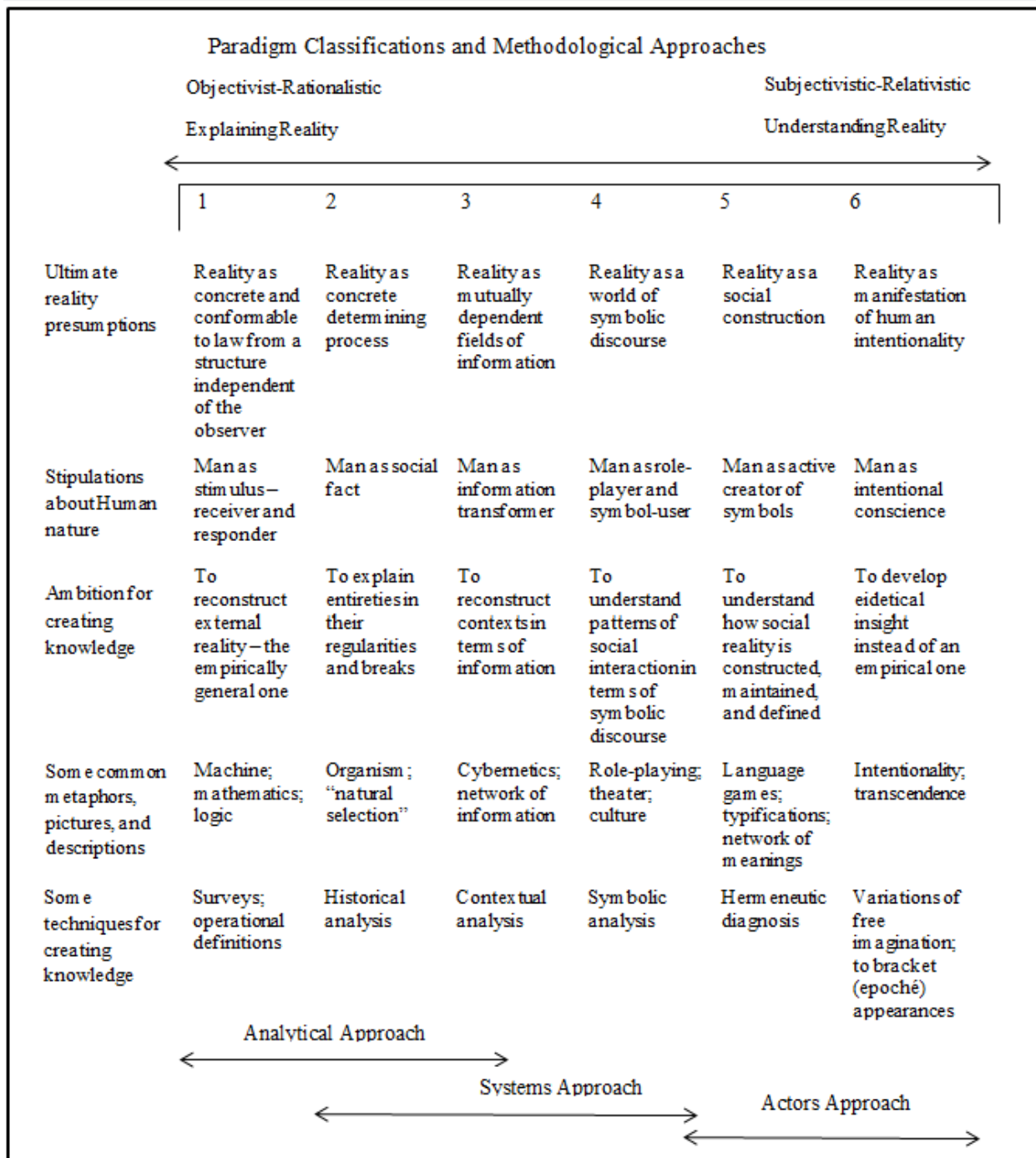
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Arbnor and Bjerke's Paradigm Classifications and Methodological Approaches

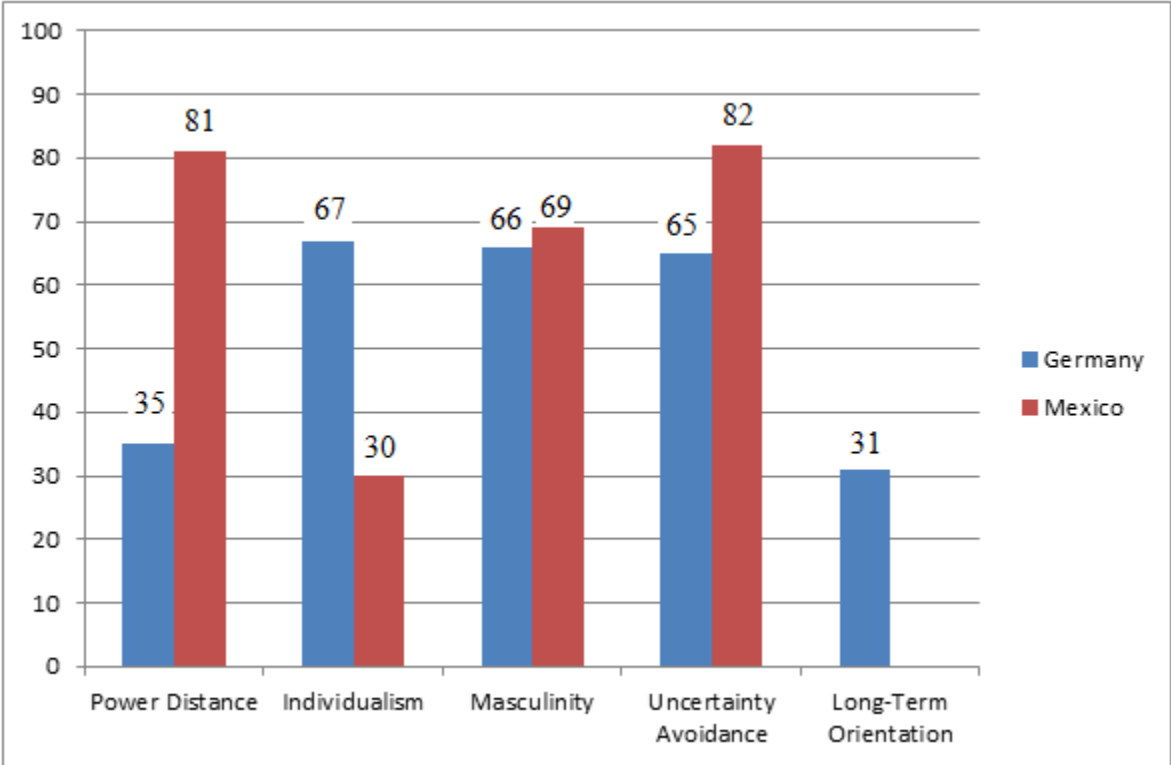


Source: Own creation based on Arbnor and Bjerke (1997, p.44 and p.27)

Appendix 2: The Four Basic Learning Style – The Individual Level

<p><i>Accommodating learning style characteristics</i> are dominated by abilities on the concrete experience and active experimentation dimensions. A person with this preference of learning style most likely prefers the “learn-by-doing” approach to tasks, to put plans into actions and involve themselves in new challenging experiences. As with the divergent style they prefer to base their decisions on intuitive feelings than by rational analytical analysis, such as the two previous learning styles. While the individual characteristics are to be initiative, bring about an empowered atmosphere and excellent networkers, they do rely on others to get the task done. In formal situations they like to work with others, they set “hairy” goals and being practical in their way of solving specific tasks. (Kolb, 1984, Kayes et al, 2005a, Kayes et al, 2005b)</p>	<p><i>Diverging learning style characteristics</i> are dominated by abilities on the concrete experience and reflective observation dimensions. A person with the preference of a diverging learning style are often dominated by an reflective view when observing a specific experience/situation, which means they like to view a situation from many different angles. The diverging style is dominating in early stages of the learning cycle, where brainstorming and generation of ideas are in focus. Further individual abilities are often characteristics of being social, sensitive, caring, a good listener, often artistic and having a broad cultural interest – and they like to gather information. While in formal situations, such as at school or in a workplace environment they have the abilities by having preference of working in groups, open dialog, feedback of a personalized character, decision-making based on intuition rather than pure rationality, and they prefer harmony appose to direct confrontations. Aspects of the characteristics of this learning style that can be improved are especially time-management and being more bold in regards to statements and actions. (Kolb, 1984, Kayes et al, 2005a, Kayes et al, 2005b)</p>
<p><i>Converging learning style characteristics</i> are dominated by abilities on the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation dimensions. A person with the preference of a converging style has the ability to transfer ideas and theories to be used in practical situations and make decisions or solutions based on their reasoning on practical problems or questions. Individual characteristic are abilities such as technical skills and problems appose to work with social or interpersonal issues, is hard working and prefer to work out from a schedule. In formal situations they experiment with their practical solutions through simulations, laboratory tests and in real practical situations where it is often preferred to work with similar converging-colleagues or alone. Persons with these abilities are important contributor to increase effectiveness – planning of goals and deadlines. However, they have some problems difficult to express themselves emotionally through words and are sometimes quite rigged on their time schedules. The latter, leaving not much room for creative solutions and spontaneity such as the characteristics of the accommodating learning style. (Kolb, 1984, Kayes et al, 2005a, Kayes et al, 2005b)</p>	<p><i>Assimilating learning style characteristics</i> are dominated by abilities on the abstract conceptualization and the reflective observation dimensions. A person with the preference of an assimilating learning style has the ability to analyze a waste amount of information and to arrange it into logical and consistent form, often by valuing the rationality behind it rather than the practical value. The assimilating style is more dominating in the second stage in the learning cycle, where the ability to create ideas and abstract concepts are important. Individual characteristic are abilities of being observational and wise, they prefer to think things true, and not to rush a conclusion. While in formal situations, it is preferred to read, attend lectures, explore analytical models, and prefer to be alone rather than in a group. While persons with these preferences are important contributors to increase effectiveness, and providing an overall picture of a situation, they have some areas which may be considered of others that need improvement – such as understanding others emotional register, handling better being in situations with much or loud people, and taking quick decisions. (Kolb, 1984, Kayes et al, 2005a, Kayes et al, 2005b)</p>

Appendix 3: Hofstede’s Dimensions of National Culture Index between Germany and Mexico



Source: Based on Hofstede (2001, p. 500)