



International and multicultural aspects in the context of EUCAM

The internationalisation of a learning system such as EUCAM requires a high degree of flexibility of the system itself and its didactical environment. The transfer of the EUCAM learning infrastructure to a new production site entails a far-reaching change in the respective company's learning culture. National differences in factors that impact upon the use and acceptance of a self-directed learning environment (e.g. differences in company structures and hierarchies, differences in workers' skills and education as well as different styles of and attitudes towards learning need to be considered.

Multilinguality therefore is not the only factor that impacts upon the adaptability of a learning system, cultural factors need to be considered in order to customise learning systems to the needs and preconditions of a particular production site / target country.

The degree to which the learning system and its didactical environment need to be adapted to the needs of the respective production site is assessed during the EUCAM test runs which take place at a number of DaimlerChrysler production sites in Europe and the US (see *Areas of Application – link*). During the test runs, the learning system is installed at various test sites throughout Europe and in the US. Needs for adaptation are assessed during the evaluation period. The assessment takes place on two broad levels, the technical and the didactical / cultural layer.

Aims of EUCAM in the international context

One of the central goals of the EUCAM project is the improvement of cooperation and communication within the European automotive industry, to achieve life-long learning and exchange of knowledge on a European level through the application of a multilingual learning and knowledge management infrastructure. A particular emphasis is placed on the integration of the complete production chain (i.e. the machine manufacturers and suppliers) into the learning and qualification process.

The cooperation of various actors of the automotive industry on an international level requires an increased understanding for cultural challenges. Thus the development of sound training and preparation measures taking into account local differences in needs and opportunities is considered an essential part of the research results of the EUCAM project.

One effort of the EUCAM project has thus been the assessment of local and national differences in terms of education and learning styles that might result in different needs with regard to the didactical environment of the EUCAM infrastructure. In order to flexibly respond to variations in learning culture it is essential not only to adjust the technical side of the learning infrastructure (such as equipping it with a translation tool) but also to adapt the didactical environment. As a self-directed learning system the EUCAM infrastructure offers a large degree of flexibility and is thus open to adaptation. However, there remains need for localisation in order to respond to the needs of the particular target user group. There are many examples of distinctions in company and learning cultures that have a great impact upon perception. For example, it has been the experience that negative feedback which would be considered constructive criticism in some countries, e.g. in Germany, is considered offensive in other cultures, e.g. the Turkish or the US American one. It is therefore vital to take into account such variations and enable the infrastructure as well as the actors involved in the transfer process to respond flexibly to the different demands on a learning system such as EUCAM.

This particularly applies to the EUCAM Coach, the didactical facilitator who supports and guides the workers through the learning and qualification process. The following chapter explores future scenarios of the EUCAM Coach in an international context and assesses existing and target competencies that are needed in a multicultural setting.

The EUCAM Coach and intercultural competencies

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the EUCAM Coach plays an important role in the implementation and sustainment of the EUCAM infrastructure. Before assessing possible future scenarios in which the EUCAM Coach is required to demonstrate the disposal of intercultural competencies, it is necessary to take a closer look at the role the EUCAM Coach plays in the context of EUCAM.

Guided learning sets itself two major targets: The first is to sensitise the worker for the new further training opportunities that arise through the implementation of a self-directed work process-oriented learning system such as EUCAM. The second aim is to support and guide training and qualification of workers directly at the work place and hereby equip them with a greater degree of involvement in the work processes.

During these processes, the EUCAM Coach takes on four main roles¹:

1. *the EUCAM Coach as the Communicator*
2. *the EUCAM Coach as the Problem-solver*
3. *the EUCAM Coach as the Coach*
4. *the EUCAM Coach as the Qualifier*

In the role of the *Communicator*, the EUCAM Coach chiefly creates and sustains a comprehensive level of acceptance towards the new learning system among the workers. In doing so, the EUCAM Coach needs to take into account the different degrees of prior experience and motivations that drive each individual worker in the use of a self-directed learning system.

The EUCAM Coach must also ensure the active engagement of workers in the learning system, again taking into account different levels of pre-existing know-how and experience is vital here in order to ensure that each worker gains from the learning system. The promotion of active participation in the learning system should ultimately lead to long-term engagement of all participants. It is imperative that the EUCAM Coach ensures effective and regular communication regarding learning progress, difficulties and problems. In this role, the EUCAM Coach communicates with all levels of actors involved in the implementation and sustainment of the learning infrastructure – the users, such as industrial workers, apprentices, group leaders etc. as well as parties involved in managing and decision-making

¹ In: DaimlerChrysler AG Mannheim/IG Metall (Hg.).Die Lernbegleitung: Aufgaben und Rollen. Projekt ALF: Arbeiten und Lernen im Fachbereich, 2004, <http://www.projekt-alf.de>, 19.06.2006.

processes surrounding the learning system, such as foremen, team leaders, division leaders and potentially management.

In the role of the *Problem-solver*, the EUCAM Coach chiefly deals with arising technical difficulties such as hard- and software problems. He does not have the responsibility to solve these issues himself but is capable of describing the problem and forwarding it to the responsible person.

One of the most important roles of the EUCAM Coach is the role of the *Coach* which involves the support and guidance of his colleagues in the self-directed learning process. The motivation of colleagues to use the learning system in order to develop personally and professionally is a key task in this field. This also involves regular feedback and advice about qualification aims and their achievement. This leads on to the last role of the EUCAM Coach – that of the *Qualifier* in which the EUCAM Coach supports the active position of the learner within a self-directed learning process:

Considering the roles of the EUCAM Coach in the context of international cooperation between different production sites it becomes clear that the necessary competencies of the EUCAM Coach have to be augmented with intercultural competencies, i.e. his social and personal competencies must be applicable beyond the setting of his own culture.

With respect to international cooperation and interculturality, possible future scenarios of the EUCAM Coach include:

1. Breaking-in and further training of industrial workers at the own production site with a cultural background different from the one of the EUCAM Coach
2. Training of EUCAM Coaches from other production sites at the own production site (when exchange of knowledge and experience is useful or required)
3. Participation in processes of exchange of knowledge at production sites abroad

A training for intercultural competencies will equip the EUCAM Coach and other actors within the implementation of EUCAM with the necessary competencies for such scenarios.²

The terms *culture*, *inter-* and *multicultural* are very broad and ambiguous. The next chapter will therefore explore the notion of culture in the context of EUCAM.

² The Training Manual for Intercultural Competencies (Deliverable D5.02) can be requested on this website, see Public Deliverables

The notion of culture in the EUCAM context

This chapter does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the concept of culture and discussions surrounding it. Instead, it aims to define the notion of culture in the EUCAM context and highlight antagonisms in the discussion surrounding conceptions of culture that are tangent to intercultural issues arising in that context with a particular focus on the needs or intercultural training of the EUCAM target group.

The term *culture* is very broad and diverse. Defining culture is a difficult undertaking as there exist many definitions pertaining to this notion – ranging from basic to highly complex and originating in different theoretical bases. Thomas defines culture as follows:

„Culture manifests itself in a typical code of denotation and orientation specific to a particular group, nation, society or organisation impacting upon individual perception, thinking, valuing and acting. Culture structures a specific area of conduct for a social group or community that reaches from created and practised objects to institutions, ideas and values.“ (Thomas, 2003)

Weidemann defines three levels on which culture - in an economical context - can be localised: Firstly, the individual level, describing the situation where an individual interacts with representatives of another culture. This level has mainly been studied from a linguistic point of view and in deployment studies focusing on the analysis of communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Secondly, culture can be localised on the organisational level which mainly involves cultural differences between entrepreneur organisations. This level is particularly important in the EUCAM context as sound knowledge of a given organisation's culture is a prerequisite when contributing to major changes in an organisation's learning culture. The EUCAM Coach will need to motivate and train workers within an organisation whose learning culture potentially differs to a great degree from the one he knows. The EUCAM Coach should be aware of these differences and the impact they have on workers' learning attitudes, communication processes and decision-making procedures within a company and so on.

The third level in which culture can be localised is the societal level that closely interacts with the organisational culture. Values and traditions rooted in a particular society will be reproduced in an organisation rooting in this society.

Cultures are often misinterpreted as temporally, spatially and socially homogeneous constructs.³ In this context, the notion of culture tends to be stigmatised as an instrument of segregation. Straub refers to this trend as a „questionable instrument of a *nolens volens* against the strange and the different.“ Samuel P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) illustrates the perception of culture as a system of competing and even antagonistic entities. Straub argues that three central phenomena support a counter-claim to this notion of culture. The increasing ‘hybridisation of culture’ and the continuous penetration of the global and the local result in “a cultural complexity resulting from the integration of systems of denotation and practices.“

Moreover, a broad notion of culture must consider regional, local and particular (transient cultural and sub-cultural forms of life) cultures. Cultures and subcultures can be regarded as either convoluted or hierarchically structured. Based on this concept, organisational culture can be perceived as a system of „convoluted, interlocking subcultures“ (Thomas, 2003, p. 39).

As company cultures vary not only in between but also within cultural spheres, it is impossible to ascribe a certain culture or cultural characteristics to a given organisation. Taking into account the issues discussed in this chapter, a major aim of training intercultural competencies of the EUCAM Coach should therefore be the sensitisation towards such differences as well as the equipment with techniques to respond and adapt to those rather than the propagation of mostly exaggerated and incorrect stereotypes pertaining to a given company’s or country’s culture. But what exactly is meant by intercultural competencies? The following chapter summarises Thomas’ definition of intercultural competencies.

Intercultural competencies

Thomas identifies a number of aspects central to intercultural competence. Firstly, the prerequisite for an appropriate, successful and mutually satisfying communication, encounter and cooperation between members of different cultures. Intercultural competence is the outcome of a learning and development process presupposing the readiness for an exchange with another culture and different systems of organisational culture based on an attitude of an appreciation for those. It becomes apparent in the capability of understanding, respecting and effectively using the cultural relativity of perception and judgment of oneself and other people. (Thomas, 2003).

³ See Straub, Jürgen (2003). *Psychologie und die Kulturen in einer globalisierten Welt*. In: Alexander Thomas (Hg.). *Kulturvergleichende Psychologie*. Göttingen: Hogrefe-Verlag, 2003, p. 544.

According to Thomas, a high degree of intercultural competency is reached when the following skills have been developed:

1. Differentiated knowledge and understanding of the one's own and other systems of cultural orientation
2. Generation of adequate forms of action, reaction and interaction in the comparison of systems of cultural orientation
3. Development of synergetic forms of intercultural acting from the concurrence of culturally divergent systems of orientation
4. Development of alternative potential of acting, patterns of attribution and unexpected reaction on behalf of the partner of the different culture.
5. The capability of transfer of knowledge and experience gained from a culture-specific situation to a different situation requiring intercultural competence.
6. The capability to act with a high degree of creativity, flexibility and confidence in situations of cultural intersection.⁴

The ‚intercultural‘ develops from the situation of intersection of two cultures; it constitutes a new form of culture developing from such a situation of intersection. The best way to convey intercultural competencies therefore is to sensitise for the situation in which the ‚intercultural‘ develops and to pass on appropriate methods to act competently in such situations.

Deliverable 5.02 of the EUCAM project contains the training manual for intercultural competencies to be utilised and evaluated during the test runs. You can request this deliverable by sending us a contact form or email stating the deliverable number, your name and organisation.

⁴ See. www.psychologie.uni-regensburg.de/Lst_Hammerl/Vortragsreihe/Thomas.pdf