



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

# **Communication in CSR project management under partnership**

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## **Abstract**

Globalization and the advance of technologies bring the development of economics, cultures and societies. However, together with that a number of challenges such as unemployment, worker exploitation, climate and environment issues, inequality, also arise. Many businesses are committing corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a way to contribute to sustainable economic and societal development. To ease the risks and strengthen the efficiency of the commitment performance, many businesses are conducting CSR projects under partnership with local authorities, agencies, organizations or other businesses. Nonetheless, not all the partnerships are fruitful. Failures of project partnerships mostly stem from the shortcomings of project management while over half of problems in project management stem from poor communication as affirmed by Ruuska [66]. Sweden is well-known for a large number of businesses committing CSR and a quantity of CSR projects launched. This inspires author to study communication in CSR projects management under the partnership between Swedish businesses and project partners. The study explores the challenges CSR project managers face and their strategies in communicating with partners when managing CSR projects. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with CSR project managers through face-to-face meeting or via Skype to collect data for the study.

The data were organized, coded and labeled under following categories for analysis: Communication medium, decision making, working style, gender bias, individuals, cost and time. The result showed that communication medium, individuals, cost and time were influential challenges in managing CSR projects under domestic and foreign partnership. Culture was seen as another challenge as well when it comes to foreign partnership. The analysis revealed CSR project managers suffer much pressure as managing partnership project when according to Morsinga et al [63b], partners are rather skeptical toward CSR communication while their opinions affect the reputation of companies. The findings indicated the combination and flexible application of communication medium, interpersonal communication and intercultural communication are the strategies that help CSR project managers deal with challenges, communicate effectively with project partners and facilitate project management in general and project results in particular.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Communication, Partnership, Project, Project Management, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Media richness theory.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 PROBLEM AREA

Apparently, we are now living under globalization, in which our world has become more connected and integrated than ever [60, 26]. Businesses easily spread their operation worldwide, increase the international competitiveness by locating their manufactures and service centers in other parts of the world, where labor costs are low [60]. As a result, a wave of investment of the western businesses into the third world nations is on the rise today. Free trade, benefits and development of economy are transparent opportunities brought up by globalization. However, in conjunction with that the world is also facing many challenges, unemployment in western countries or worker exploitation in the third world nations, climate and environment issues, democratic problems and inequality, for instance [36, 60, 82:xv cited in 60:3]. This makes our world more complex than ever before [60], putting pressure on businesses to engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) when the needs of society transcend the ability of local authority [43, 58, 62, 28].

CSR illustrates the relationship between businesses and societies [25, 35, 84, 88, 81]. It is defined by The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) as the commitment of businesses “to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families and the local communities and society at large to improve their quality of life” [86]. It is also about conducting the businesses “in a manner that meets high social and environmental standards” [27:37 cited in 41:7].

Many businesses all over the world have been practicing CSR engagement through projects related to environment, health, human right, equality, energy and economy. The success of these projects and activities helps businesses get many benefits such as decreasing cost and risk, increasing competitive advantages, enhancing reliability and reputation, impacting consumers’ purchase behavior, attracting qualified staffs and growing commitment of current employees [41, 28, 40, 58, 6, 19, 13]. In turn, failure of CSR projects will harm businesses’ reputation [28].

Companies may be criticized for these failures and customers may lose trust and reduce engagement with companies.

Corporate social responsibility and corporate philanthropic projects are, thus, much more focused by firms [50]. Many scholars and societal actors reckon that “CSR can only be fully developed in partnership” [65:153]. Thenceforth, besides independent projects, many businesses are partnering with local communities, authorities, agencies or businesses aiming at reducing risks and attaining better outcomes as well as quicker success for CSR projects. However, project partnership is not always successful. The complexity of projects per se as well as partners’ different background (*knowledge, values, interest, outlooks, expectation, experience, skills, etc*) engenders the problems or failures of corporate projects. For instance, as researched by Frynas [28] Shell in Nigeria partnered with Nigerian local authority and community to implement development projects as a way to prove their CSR engagement. Notwithstanding, less than 1/3 of these projects were successful. In Equatorial Guinea, mosquito nets donated by ExxonMobil to the Health Ministry for malaria prevention project were sold through export to Cameroon as reported by officials. In Angola, Asian-made condoms distributed by BP Company in an anti-AIDS campaign were too small for African men [28]. Failures of these projects could come from various reasons; however, it visibly shows project management had problems. Over half of problems in project management derive from poor handled communication [66]. Gillard & Johansen [30] indicated that miscommunication results in mis-management of knowledge. This emphasizes the importance of effective communication in project management, especially under partnership.

Sweden is a well-known country for its sustainable development. It has many CSR activists [19] and a number of businesses committed CSR such as Volvo, Nestlé, Löfbergs Lila, Johnson & Johnson, Fabege, IKEA, SKF, Capgemini, AXFood, MCDONALD’S, SAAB and SAS Group. They have been launching many social, economic and environmental projects with both local and global scope. Many of them are conducted under domestic and foreign partnership to further contribute and develop positive impacts. For instance, Fabege cooperates with SOS children’s villages to build and support family house in SOS children’s village, Cibitoke in Burundi, Africa (<http://www.fabege.se/>). Volvo collaborates with China Youth Development Foundation to offer three-day training courses to 200 teachers working at Hope Schools in Hubei, Sichuan, Guizhou

& Yunnan provinces (<http://www.volvogroup.com>). Capgemini partners with Naandi Foundation in India to support Indian girls (<http://www.se.capgemini.com/>). Published results of these projects inspire author to study the challenges project managers face and the strategies employed in their communication with partners in CSR projects.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The study aims at outlining and analyzing challenges project managers face and the strategies employed in communicating with partners in CSR projects. Basing on collected data, the study will identify and shed light on the effective communication strategies for project managers managing CSR projects under domestic and foreign partnership. Consequently, the study contributes more insight for CSR projects' managers so that they can improve their performances in practice.

## **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- 1- What are the challenges for project managers when working and communicating with domestic and foreign partners in CSR projects?*
- 2- How are these challenges managed to facilitate CSR project management and help CSR projects attain good results?*

## **1.4 DEFINITIONS**

### **Project**

The term project is not new, starting back in time human implemented big projects like Great Chinese Wall, Egyptian Pyramids and Greek Parthenon. However, after the Project Management Institute (PMI) was set up in 1969, the use of projects became increasingly popular, reaching 44,000 members in 1998 [59]. Along with that, various researches have been performed to clarify and bring better understanding about it.

In 1959, Gaddis defined project as “an organization unit dedicated to the attainment of a goal — generally the successful completion of a developmental product on time, within budget, and in conformance with predetermined performance specifications”. In 1969, PMI defined it as “a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product and service” [59]. Many years later, a



number of definitions were generated by various authors, but they often involved the terms of unique tasks, or activities executed within limited time and budget to achieve specific objectives [64, 24, 73]. According to Sachs and colleagues [76b], the specific objective of CSR projects is to provide added value for society and stakeholders.

### **Project management**

“Along with the increased use of projects, the complexity and cost of projects have also increased” [73:1]. It thus calls for a new and different method of management since principal tasks cannot be executed in traditional ways [73, 59, 32, 47]. Hence, project management, defined as planning, collecting, organizing, administrating and controlling resource to gain objective in a limited time and cost [69, 67 cited in 3, 2 cited in 63, 49 cited in 47], emerged and is used commonly as a tool to deal with complexities and accomplish specific purposes [87, 64, 47, 59]. This enhances the critical role of project managers.

### **Project manager**

A project manager is a person accountable for whole process of a project [47, 59]. His/her tasks are to direct, coordinate, and control resources and people to ensure project’s success. The works of scheduling, budgeting, staffing, managing risks have never been easy. To start a project, it requires the involvement and engagement of not only the project manager but also other stakeholders such as senior manager, project team members, partners, clients and public. However, according to Meredith & Mantel [59] these people seem “to talk in different languages”. Therefore, many problems arise and it requires the project manager to spend most of his/her time to communicate (*discussing, debating, negotiating, persuading, managing conflicts and so on*) with stakeholders [59]. To manage a project effectively and productively, the project manager must be good at communication as the suggestion of Brandel [7].

### **Communication**

Communication is one of the daily activities of human life [52:1], involving “formulating, transmitting, receiving verbal & non-verbal messages that produce a response, evaluation, possible correction” [30:1]. According to Allwood [1:2] “without communication, most human collective activities couldn’t exist”. This exhibits its tremendous importance in our lives and raises special attention to scholars. In 1976, Dance and Larson listed 126 definitions about

communication and this number is still rising today [55]. In 2002, Allwood defined communication as a “transmission of content X from a sender Y to a recipient Z using an expression W and a medium Q in an environment E with a purpose/function F” [1:8]. In 2006, Lustig & Koester narrowed down the definition for communication in their intercultural communication study as “a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people create shared meanings” [55:10]. Communication through the view of Craig [11:39] is “a practice involving human’s activities like reading, writing, listening, talking, witnessing or doing anything to transfer messages in any medium or situation”.

### **Partnership**

Mohr and Spekman [61] defined partnership as a strategic interdependent relationship formulated among independent firms to gain mutual benefits, which might hardly achieve as acting alone. Darlow & Newby in 1997 also shared similar point of view but extended the sphere of this interdependent relations to organizations, individuals or institutions “working towards a commonly defined goal” [16:74 cited in 17:191]. As mentioned above, the impetus of partnership in CSR projects nowadays probably derives from the vantage of increasing facilities and easing risks of project performance. Hence, it further highlights the critical role of communication in CSR project management under partnership that the author is studying.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

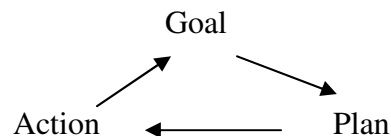
In this chapter, theoretical background forming the basis for the analysis of the empirical results is presented. The author will discuss the interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, and media richness theory because they are all related to the research questions that the author has derived and is in an effort to figure out the answers. First and foremost, the communication process between project managers and partners is a form of person-to-person communication; so, interpersonal communication theory links to the author’s study. Besides, researching a project under the domestic and foreign partnership also raises concerns about the cultural factor, which might influence the partnership communication in general and project management in particular. Last, geographical distance and the advance of communication technology today are increasingly creating diverse options for people to interact with each other. Therefore, the author also relies on the media richness theory to analyze the project managers’ choices of communication medium.

## 2.1 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

“Communication is a crucial aspect of co-operative work” [37:1]. While interpersonal communication is a central unit of every interaction since it is defined by Lustig & Koester [55] as a form of person-to-person interaction, normally occurring between two or more people in a small group. Studying the communication under cooperation between project managers and partners requires the author to take a serious look at communication patterns affecting their communication process, and interpersonal communication is a part of it.

### 2.1.1 GOAL – PLAN – ACTION THEORY (GPA)

GPA is one of many theories in interpersonal communication. It is spelled out by Dillard in his study in 1990 as a message production process to purposely influence others’ attitudes or behaviors [4]. Message production process has three steps: Goal, Plan and Action; in which, goals motivates plans and plans determine behaviors (action) to accomplish goals [4].



Dillard classifies 7 types of primary goals (or influence goals): gain assistance, give advice, share activity, change orientation, change relationship, obtain permission, enforce rights and obligation, enabling individuals to bracket interaction. Besides, he also provides 5 types of secondary goals: Identity goals focusing on ethical and moral behaviors, conversation management goals concerning impression management and face, relational resource goals concerning relationship management, personal resource goal reflecting physical, temporal, material concern of communicator and after management goals concerning maintenance of preferred affective state. These concepts of goals will be underpinnings for the study since interactions between project managers and project partners are a goal-driven process. Although they might have different objectives regarding cost, performance and staffs, for instance, the final and holistic aim is the success of project [4].

### 2.1.2 COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY (CA)

Communication Accommodation (CA) Theory, another theory in interpersonal communication, argues that people adjust their communication style similar to others (convergent) to gain approval or different (divergent) to others to show their certain position [57]. This theory is relevant to the author's study since cooperating and frequently communicating with partners, who may come from different countries or cultures, will require project managers to adjust their communication styles (*tone of voice, gestures, body language, clothes and so on*) to be suitable with partners' cultural values, custom, etc. This demonstrates her/his goodwill, and friendliness, which facilitates communication process, strengthens relationship, builds trust, and enhances collaboration.

## **2.2. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Communication is a part of culture; therefore, in order to understand about communication, we need to understand about the culture [42]. "Intercultural communication occurs when large and important cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently" [55:52]. Partnering and communicating with people from different cultures may involve misunderstandings, which lead to not only the breakdown of communication flow but also the conflicts in serious projects. Hence, an efficient project manager must be knowledgeable and competent in the intercultural communication.

### **2.2.1 HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL TAXONOMY**

Surveying over 100,000 IBM staffs in 71 countries, Hofstede's work detailed relationships between cultural values and social behaviors. His study identifies five dimensions of main values of different cultures; which are, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, and long-term vs. short-term orientation [55].

Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV): shows the different level of cultures relating to individual autonomy, and to what extent cultures stimulate uniqueness and independence or conformity and interdependence of individuals.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI): refers to what extent people tolerate, change and cope with uncertainties. Cultures with low UAI prefer to minimize the numbers of rules or rituals and

accept or stimulate dissents, taking risks and challenges of people. Whereas, cultures with high UAI encourage consensus; set up many sets of rules, regulations, and rituals to control behaviors of cultural members.

Power Distance (PDI): indicates the degree to which cultural people view inequality and challenge or accept institutional and organizational power. Cultures with low PDI prefer low power distance, less hierarchical organizational structure and try to minimize inequality, which in turn is not accepted and preferred by cultures with high PDI.

Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS): Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.

Long-term vs. Short-term orientation (LTO): refers to the people's views about life and work. For instance, high LTO cultures respects hierarchy of the status of relationships, values humility, and persistence. Consequently, low LTO cultures appreciate tradition, personal steadiness and stability, maintaining "face" of self and others [55].

### **2.2.2 HALL'S HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT CULTURAL TAXONOMY**

Edward T. Hall concerns about the relationship between culture and communication. In his study, he asserted that cultural setting and context would affect the messages transferred. For example, high context cultures like Japanese, African, American and Mexican prefer to use high-context messages which are implicit. Most of the meaning is often implied by norms, values, beliefs, social practice or physical settings, very little is explicit. Whereas, low context cultures such as Swedish, German, English prefer to use low-context messages which are explicit. Hall also described the characteristics of high-and low-context cultures relating to the use of covert/overt messages, importance of in-groups and out-groups, and the time orientation [55].

### **2.3 MEDIA – RICHNESS THEORY**

Many state-of-the-art communication media are employed by organizations and businesses nowadays as a way to facilitate their staffs' communication. People from great distances can still discuss and work together at different time frames with support of communication media like computer, video-conferencing system, telephones and so on. Decision making as well as work are, thus, done quicker. Accordingly, expenditure is also reduced. However, Daft and Lenggen in 1986 argued that options of different communications media would affect information transmission and task performance [83]. Media too rich for the task causes heavy workload, distraction of communication while media too lean for the task is unable to transfer enough information [83]. It means that good matching the task requirements with medium capacity bring the efficiency of communication [71]. Face-to-face meeting is considered the richest medium for the ability allowing communicators to send and receive immediate feedback, check interpretation and captures communication cues like facial expression, body language, gestures, etc [83, 77]. Telephones, written documents such as letters, notes, memos, standard report and bulletins are seen as lean medium as compared with face-to-face meetings [83, 71]. The author will base on this theory to analyze the project managers' choices of communication medium since geographical distance between CSR project managers and partners as well as the diversity of communication technologies nowadays may affect their choices and interaction.

To sum up, this chapter presented five theories relating to interpersonal communication, intercultural communication and communication medium which the study will base on to analyze the data. The five theories are Goal-Plan-Action Theory, Accommodation Theory, Hofstede's Cultural Taxonomy, Hall's High-and Low-Context Cultural Taxonomy and Media Richness Theory.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 RESEARCH METHOD**

Charmaz [12] states that methods are just tools to conduct researches but there are always some tools more useful than others. Qualitative method is one of valuable methods, which zeroes in on the quality of things, collecting and summarizing practical data to identify who, what and where people experience [78]. It is just a collection of evidences [89] and enables researchers to get in-

depth understanding of things or to reason the phenomenon in a meaningful way [20]. Consequently, research participants' social and material circumstances, experiences, perspectives and history can be profoundly studied and understood [76 cited in 77]. Due to limited number of study about communication in CSR project management, especially under the partnership as the author could search on Scholar.google.se, Scencedirect.com, Wiley Online Library (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>), Gothenburg University Library's website (<http://www.ub.gu.se/>) & Cambridge Journal (<http://journals.cambridge.org>), the decision of conducting valuable qualitative method to understand insight about this field has been made.

### **3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH**

Grounded theory method is commonly used in qualitative research [21, 22]. It is presented as a constant comparative method to generate or discover theories basing on empirical data [22, 12] and mostly concentrating on the situation, social process and interaction [21, 77]. From the word of Charmaz, (1983 p.95) & Glaser (1978 p.92), the constant comparison in Grounded theory method is about views, situations, actions, accounts and experiences, or data from the same people but in different time, or incident with incident, data with category or category with category [21]. Similar to those of qualitative method, data of grounded theory are also collected through observation, interview, and documentary materials; however, its striking feature lies in the capability to stop data collection process and conclude research as soon as reaching the data saturation point, meaning that adequate theory emerges and no more additional information, categories to learn and capture. For this study, the author decides to apply the grounded theory approach. It connotes that the author will study the context, situation, interaction process, feelings and attitudes of project managers by asking open interview questions to collect rich empirical data for analysis. The information shared by different interviewees will be compared constantly in the analysis process to see the differences or similarities of empirical data.

Grounded theory is also classified as inductive method in which theory is generated from data [8]. Induction is the description, explanation and reason of information or frequency of events in order to infer conclusion (*premise*); even so, the conclusion of induction may or may not be true [23, 44]. For instance, experiencing kindness of several people in one country you visit can result in the induction assumption that people in that country are friendly and helpful; or being unable

to start your car will lead you to the inference of the death of battery [44]. Many inferences are relied on prior knowledge but these can be true or false. The car could not be started due to many possible reasons like running out of petrol or something else. People are different and it is a premature to assume that all people of that country are friendly and helpful. This example shows the implicit venture of induction when no guarantee exists [44]. Dey [22] said that “A theory can be grounded only if it withstands the test(s) of further inquiry” and O’Leary [68] suggested researchers combine inductive and deductive methods to get profound understanding.

Deduction is a tool to test against evidence [22]. In deductive method, theory or hypothesis is developed before the collection process of data and is used to explain observed fact [79]. Thereupon, premises are claimed to support the conclusion, and the conclusion from deductive reasoning is necessarily true if the premises are true [23, 45, 39 cited in 85]. For instance, 96% students at university A can speak English and German while B is student of university A so the highest probability is that B speaks both English and German.

In this study, the author will use abduction, which is considered as the combination of both induction and deduction. Abduction is defined as inference to the best explanation [33 cited in 85, 46, 85] “of a given fact or findings” [85:4]. “Abduction is linked with the areas of planning and causation” [9:388], meaning that the author will rely on literature review to figure out the problems of the field and develop research questions. Then, the author bases on existing theories to design the appropriate mode of study, which helps gain vast and in-depth needed information.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

#### **3.3.1 INTERVIEW**

Interviewing is one of the most common tools in qualitative research used to collect information [77] and produce factual data about social world [38 cited in 77]. It is regarded as a discussion with specific purpose of accomplishing understanding about certain issues [48 cited in 79]. Qu and Dumay [75] and Saunders et al [79] categorized interview into three types: structured, semi-structured and non-structured. In this study, the author elects the semi-structured interview type, which means that the author designs themes and open-ended questions prior to the interview but is flexible in asking questions. For examples, the author would change the order of questions to



fit with the flow of the conversation, or omit or add some follow-up questions at the interview if necessary to explore in-depth the aspect of research. Besides, with this kind of interview, interviewees would be more active in sharing their own story whereby vast data collected will help researcher understand, reveal and emphasize what, how and why interviewees do in the events and situations in a particular context [79, 75].

### **Face-to-face interview**

Face-to-face meeting is a rich medium, allowing communicators easily convey trust & goodwill [83, 71]. Additionally, with face-to-face interview, interviewer can obtain further information such as voice, intonation, body movement, facial expression, which will complement the data from interviewees' answers [70]. Two more other advantages of face-to-face approach are also indicated by Opdenakker [70]; that are easily implementing tape recording to collect and save detailed information as well as terminating the interview through some clues like turning down papers, switching off the tape and saying thank you. In the viewpoint of Hennink et al [34] opposite with other surveys like questionnaire and telephone interviews, interviewees in face-to-face method are much more active in interacting with their interviewers. Interviewer can come up with ideas and investigate motives and feelings of interviewees that questionnaires cannot do [5].

Being possible to approach the project manager working for Volvo Technology Corporation in Gothenburg- Sweden, where the author is doing the research, face-to-face interview method is employed.

### **Video interview via Skype**

Owing to geographical distance, cost and time, it's unfeasible for the author to conduct face-to-face meetings with three other project managers working for the International Coffee Partners (ICP) in Germany, a furniture company in Helsingborg, Sweden and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Stockholm - Sweden. Video interview via Skype is used as an optimal choice in these cases. Otondo and his colleagues [71] claimed that video medium is much closer to face-to-face medium compared to others such as audio, email and letters because communicators can interact in real time, capturing body languages, facial expression, and tone of voice, whereby rapport and trust seems to be easier to build and to develop.

### **3.3.2 SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES**

With the desire to investigate the communication aspect in CSR project management under the partnership between Swedish businesses and project partners, the author plans to interview project managers, who are responsible for the CSR projects, meet project partners, communicate with them, deal with differences in ideas, conflicts, and so on, to ensure everything is handled and managed effectively. The in-depth interviews are conducted for about one hour, and the questions are open-ended, circling around the issues of what, how, when and why he/she communicates with project partner during the process of CSR project management. Interviews are conducted in English, audio-recorded and later on transcribed to support for analysis.

### **3.3.3 INTERVIEW GUIDE**

In line with Hennik et al [34], interview guide is a list of questions designed to aid interviewer's memory during the interview. It is not like questionnaires, which are structured and inclined towards close-ended questions and interviewees are supposed to respond questions posed by interviewers. Rather, interview guide is less structured and designed by open-ended questions. This enables and stimulates interviewees to take part proactively in sharing their stories and experiences.

Interview guide for this study is thus designed and divided into four subthemes: introduction, opening questions, key questions and closing questions. The introduction part is general information about the author's study purpose, method of data collection, outcome of study and ethical consideration about interviewees' responses as whether or not they want to be anonymous. This not only helps the interviewees understand about the study but also helps build trust, credibility, and rapport. In the opening question part, the author will learn about the interviewees as well as gradually promote rapport through general questions about themselves, work, responsibilities, or seniority at work. Key questions about the projects and how they communicate with project partners are in the third part of the interview guide. Probing questions are asked where open-type questions cannot yield specific answers. The last part of interview is closing questions. The author will gradually reduce rapport and thank interviewees for their time and support (see more in Appendix).

### **3.3.3 PILOT STUDY**

To make sure the interview guide is good; fundamentally, question order is logical, questions, concepts, words and phrases are intelligible by interviewees, the information gained can support for research question and the interview doesn't take too long or short, the author conducted two pilot tests with two persons. First one was the video interview via Skype with a Ugandan project manager, who is responsible for international projects at Sabre International in Dubai. Second one was the face-to-face interview with a project manager working at SKF Company in Sweden. In doing so, inappropriate points such as order of questions, and questions per se were modified, adjusted and improved or some probes were also supplemented to ensure the best preparation for official interviews. Duration of the pilot interviews indicated that one hour was just enough to obtain essential information. Besides, the author also decided to ask the interviewees for the permission of emailing them for further information as needed.

### **3.4 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF STUDY**

Long & Johnson [54] argue that ambiguity and meaninglessness of the upshot of study might not only waste time and effort of researchers but also cause the dangerousness and harmfulness in practice. Hence, there is a growing consensus among scholars about the openness of studies for testing and evaluating to warrant their quality. Patton [72 cited in 31] gives suggestions concerning reliability and validity when designing qualitative study, analyzing and judging its outcomes and quality. These two factors have been commonly used in qualitative research nowadays [31]. Seale [80 cited in 31] asserts that trustworthiness is crucial in ensuring validity and reliability of qualitative study.

Validity refers to the outcome of a study to which extent the obtained information can “measure the phenomenon of interest” [1b:320]. As argued by Ahlqvist [1b], to accomplish validity of a study, researchers should design the study properly by constructing theories, choosing applicable instrument to capture information and proceeding data in a consistent manner. In this thesis, to attain validity of the research, the author logically designed questions to be as clear as possible, which were then reviewed by the supervisor and tested twice as elaborated above. In addition, in order to make sure the interviewees are fully clear about the aim and focus of the study and to gain credibility and trust, the list of questions was sent to them beforehand. In so doing,

interviewees can have some preparation or could also contact the author if information or elaborations are needed before the interviews. However, author believes that providing the questions beforehand will not affect the quality of the data due to the openness of the questions. More importantly, all probes were not revealed beforehand.

Reliability is seen as the consistency, constancy or dependability of a research instrument [53, 74 cited in 54] to achieve consistence of data [10 cited in 31]. Additionally, as reported by Suanders et al [79] reliability of the qualitative research with the semi-structured interview method relates to bias avoidance of interviewees. Being aware of these, the author suggests to interviewees to do interview in a quiet setting to avoid distraction that would affect the quality of recording. However, the settings must also be similar and comfortable to interviewees. Consequently, interviewees are often at their offices while being interviewed. Besides, the author manages to dress suitably with the contexts, maintaining neutral attitudes to all information provided and asking questions in a normal tone of voice. Also, to avoid the skepticism about the objective of study as well as the unwillingness of interviewees towards revealing information or reluctance in sharing fuller account, the list of questions was sent beforehand to build trust as foregoing description. Plus, during the interviews, author conducted audio-recording as a consistent way to save data as well as to warrant their trustworthiness.

### **3.5 LIMITATION**

The method of data collection still showed limitations even though the author chose and conducted two of the best methods of data collection, which were face-to-face & video interview via Skype. Since the study focuses on the communication process between CSR project manager and partner during the lifecycle of a project, it would be a vantage if the observations could be made. However, it was impossible for the author to employ that method due to the confidentiality of the companies, geographical distance, cost and time. Nonetheless, as argued by Merriam [56], when researchers cannot observe to see how people feel, behave and interpret the world around them; hence, interviewing is an important and necessary method for gathering the information.

Communication between CSR project manager and project partner is a two-way interaction process; so, interviewing CSR project managers indicated limitation of collecting one-side information. Even though the study focuses on challenges CSR project managers face and their own strategies as working and communicating with partners, being able to interview partners of CSR project managers as well could help author get additional information.

## **4. RESULTS: EMPIRICAL DATA DESCRIPTION**

This chapter presents the empirical data of study in two parts. Part 1 provides the general information and description regarding the CSR projects managed by project managers from different companies. Part 2 shows the pragmatic result vis-à-vis the communication challenges in project management when conducting the CSR projects, and how these challenges are managed to facilitate the project's results.

### **4.1 PROJECT INFORMATION**

As noted earlier, both face-to-face and Skype interviews are executed with different project managers of different companies. All interviewees have master degrees in different areas and have worked for these companies between 5 and 11 years. One interviewee would like to be anonymous; therefore, the author will not mention her name as well as the name of her company to guarantee the confidentiality.

#### **The management consulting project in Ethiopia**

Some years ago, Volvo – Sweden signed a contract to sell 1000 trucks to a business partner in Ethiopia. It was a common sales contract between a seller and a buyer. However, being new and inexperienced in this field, the client asked Volvo to support setting up a model of operation management. This includes designing how the company should be organized, planning transport, setting up system to order spare parts, following up processes, and even coaching them how to set prices and how to react with customers. Assigned to the post of project manager relating to IT system in transport planning department, Daniel, Technology Area Director of Volvo Technology Corporation was responsible for designing the business process in transport planning department, helping them deploy IT system and also training their staffs. As said by Daniel, the CSR factor in that project was the interest of environment and society: “*Volvo introduces them*

*the modern way of managing. We think we sort of create value system in the company more like the value system we have in company here... less hierarchy, little bit more democratic, equality, human right.*'' As a result, the new company operates more efficiently than the old ones in the area, followed by the improvement of transport in Ethiopia, which is important for the development of this country. *''In Ethiopia that's clearly a project because they hardly have vehicles for heavy transport so it's very hard for them to transport for instance bringing the goods from the port to the capital. So transport in a way is really fundamental function in society. You have to have transport. You need to have efficient transport; otherwise, with inefficient transport you can't drive crops and it's disaster in a poor country''* said Daniel. Besides, in the viewpoint of Daniel, the success of the company brings about the demand for personnel with higher education. People have to go to technical universities to get training before they get jobs offered by the company. During the process of project, Daniel often worked with four local Ethiopians: the top manager, the chairman of Human Resource & the financial officers.

### **The sustainable coffee production project in Tanzania**

The sustainable coffee production project in Tanzania has been conducting by Jorge Tiemeier, the manager of the International Coffee Partners (ICP) in Germany. It has been deployed from 2008, aiming to support smallholder farmers towards being economically self-sufficient, strong and competitive entrepreneurs. It is also to initiate, implement and scale-up best practices, and to address protection of natural resources and challenges associated with climate change and biodiversity. The reason stems from the poverty of many Tanzanian smallholder farmers. They have limited access to know-how, technology, financial services and competitive markets. Additionally, lack of knowledge of production practice results in environmental threats such as deforestation, soil degradation, waste of water, pollution and loss of biodiversity. As a result, holistic purpose of the project is to help contribute to the improvement of economy, environment and society on both a national and an international level. Löfbergs Lila AB of Sweden is one of the important private partners of ICP, playing a role as a donor for this project. Jorge Tiemeier often works with private partners in Europe, including Löfbergs Lila AB of Sweden as well as regional and country teams in Tanzania to supervise activities, component of project to guarantee quality of the work.

## **The environmental booklet publishing project in Sweden**

The third project is implemented under the domestic partnership between a furniture company (FCo.,) and a local Non-profit organization (NGO) in Sweden. The project is about publishing a booklet, comprising of 10 to 15 articles. The principle aim of the booklet is to share different angles in the areas, where they are partnering with, such as how to improve soil, forestry and climate. The author interviews the project manager, who works as sustainability communicator of this furniture company. Her work is to compile and set up interview with people in her company and then share & discuss the information with her project partner.

## **The forest projects in Vietnam, Lao and China**

Louise Carlsson is a person of The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Sweden. She is responsible for forest projects in Vietnam, Lao and China, which are conducted under the partnership between WWF and IKEA, a famous furniture company in Sweden. The main purpose of the forest projects is to work on responsible forest management, supplication and to work against illegal timber trade to maintain the natural resources in the world in a responsible way. She often contacts with the IKEA partner to coordinate and collect reports on those projects.

## **4.2 EMPIRICAL RESULT**

In this part, the author will present the results gained from pragmatic data as the answers corresponding to two research questions. In order to be clear the results will be presented separately into two parts. Part 1 is about the challenges that the project managers have to cope when working and communicating with domestic/ foreign project partners. Part 2 discusses the strategies applied by the project managers to deal with challenges to facilitate project management and accomplish goals set forth.

### **4.2.1 CHALLENGES FOR PROJECT MANAGERS AS WORKING AND COMMUNICATING WITH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN PARTNERS IN CSR PROJECTS**

Two of interviewees expressed satisfaction towards their partnership while the rest of interviewees didn't give any comments. They had a hard time as partnering and managing project but they all stated that their partners are intelligent, good knowledge and experience in their work.

*“Excellent, just excellent... just brilliant in a sense that... I think we... ah how to say it... just great... very much appreciate from our side. That there is too commitment, too interest from partner from Sweden, Löfberg in the work we are conducting. Also, they visited several projects to better learn and better understand what are happening and see what are problems and possible options for the solution and how does it work in details”.*

(Jorge Tiemier, Germany)

*“So far, it's really good cooperation. From my point of view, I think communication is really open. We share a lot with each other and we support each other as much as we can”.*

(Sustainability communicator of FCo., Sweden)

Still, despite of that, as the foregoing, complexity of projects cannot be denied. All interviewees agreed about that point. Consequently, challenges and strategies to deal with them are openly shared by interviewees.

Challenges	Quotes	Partnership
Communication medium	<p><i>Before when I communicated through emails, I thought they didn't understand my questions and I couldn't understand why everything took so long time.</i></p> <p><i>“Well, it's hard to call in Ethiopia; the line is very noisy. You can't talk over the phone very much so email is pretty much surely option”</i></p> <p><i>“If you call him, he rarely answers and if you send emails he rarely answers as well. So face-to-face meeting was the way to get his attention”</i></p> <p><i>We tried to meet him every week but he kept cancelling and changing so in reality it's more like in every other week.</i> (Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)</p>	Sweden-Ethiopia
	<p><i>I'm Helsingborg and she is in Stockholm so we can't see each other so often... We don't use Skype in our company.</i> (Sustainability Communicator – FCo.)</p>	Sweden-Sweden
Decision making	<p><i>The man at the top decided everything. The guy in the middle of hierarchy can't decide anything. He can give orders to the people below him but he can't decide anything before he takes it to manager. The decisions took time because one person can't have time to do</i></p>	Sweden-Ethiopia



	<p>everything like this.</p> <p>(Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)</p>	
<b>Working style</b>	<p>“Hierarchical”; “Well... [sigh] it’s quite formal”; “I tried to dress likely more casual”; “The partner showed up in tie all the time”</p> <p>“In Ethiopia, when you want to be formal you have to say Mr and first name”</p> <p>“And sort of the way expressing power, he showed up late and left early or maybe canceled the meeting with short notice”; “we waited almost one hour”</p> <p>The meetings started and lasted pretty long – 3 hours without any break.</p> <p>During the meeting, secretary came in many times with new papers for him to sign and he kept talking for a while and she left. But then his phone rang very loudly many times, he said sorry and talked for a while and came back to meeting.</p> <p>(Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)</p>	Sweden- Ethiopia
	<p>“we are informal in generally I could say”; “I can sense that their organization is a bit formal than we are”</p> <p>(Sustainability Communicator – FCo.,)</p>	Sweden- Sweden
	<p>There are a lot of shortcomings... a lot of problems in this country, also in Uganda and some activities in Kenya. But Tanzania is specific project I would say also due to socialist background the country has. The deterrent of those of a lot of thinking of many people in this country and also processes of public institution’s bureaucracy, etc</p> <p>(Jorge Tiemeier - ICP)</p>	Germany - Tanzania
	<p>It’s really informal. And Ikea is known for informal when it comes to clothing. It’s not often they have jacket or suit. And people I have contact with are forest people so it’s more casual.</p> <p>(Louise Carlsson – WWF)</p>	Sweden- Sweden
<b>Gender bias</b>	<p>always the man there is not feminist on the top</p> <p>(Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)</p>	Sweden- Ethiopia
<b>Individuals</b>	<p>The person in IKEA that I communicate with is much more senior than I am. I’m just junior so there is a big gap about knowledge and experiences between us.</p> <p>(Louise Carlsson – WWF)</p>	Sweden- Sweden
	<p>“There is one more thing I’d like to emphasize that we can’t forget about individuals here.</p> <p>(Daniel Zackrisson – Volvo)</p>	Sweden- Ethiopia
<b>Cost &amp; Time</b>	<p>We had very strict time and budget frame. We had to finish on time. We had to make sure that we couldn’t overspend</p> <p>(Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)</p>	Sweden- Ethiopia
	<p>FCo., is very cost-conscious company and don’t do anything where we have to pay for content for instance, whereas NGO sometimes would like us to.</p> <p>(Sustainability Communicator – FCo.,)</p>	Sweden- Sweden

	<p><i>Problem is that we are dealing, investing funds from third parties where we are fully comfortable for good use and also impact generated out of investment of this fund. This is then very... how to say... really difficult in one hand side and requires immediate solution.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Jorge Tiemeier – ICP)</p>	Germany-Sweden & other donors
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#### 4.2.2 HOW ARE THOSE CHALLENGES MANAGED TO FACILITATE PROJECT MANAGMENET AND HELP PROJECT ATTAIN GOOD RESULT?

Strategy	Quotes	Partnership
<b>Learning</b>	<p><i>“After a while you learned to accept their way and realized that it not work by getting upset”; “You accept the thing take longer time”</i></p> <p><i>“They don’t really start the meeting at 8 o’clock, 3 o’clock and 5 o’clock”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)</p>	Sweden-Ethiopia
<b>Plan/ preparation</b>	<p><i>“get the short cultural introduction course before you start an assignment like this”</i></p> <p><i>“Besides the training, I prepared the meetings more or less the same way they did”; “...try to dress like clients; if you meet bankers, you dress like bankers and if you meet computer engineers you should dress the like them”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)</p>	Sweden-Ethiopia
	<p><i>Sometimes we have document and send them before so they can prepare and get answer from people, get much information as they can.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sustainability Communicator- FCo.,</p>	Sweden-Sweden
<b>Adaptation &amp;</b>	<p><i>“If possible you need to take it to the top. On the other hand, if you go straight to the top and skip the guy in middle then the guy in middle will get a little bit upset because then you short of cut him out of the loop. In order to keep everyone happy you still have to pass to this guy there”</i></p> <p><i>“You should avoid talking about such as politics, religion at the first time you interact with clients. You are supposed to stick to business so you can avoid the most sensitive issues”</i></p> <p><i>For my first meeting there, we just guessed and wore the simple black jacket, no tie. The partner showed up in tie all the time so we went back the tie again.</i></p> <p><i>We shook hands and greeted Mr A – first name and talked a little bit.</i></p> <p><i>We always made a point of being there on time and respond immediately to emails or try to set up agenda to or respect his agenda</i></p>	Sweden-Ethiopia

<b>Adjustment</b>	<i>and show that it's really important to us.</i>	
	<i>Face-to-face meeting was the way to get his attention.</i> (Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)	
	<i>We meet every other month but we need to talk more quite often...so phone calls are convenient. Besides, we email quite often and I think it works really well.</i>  <i>I feel they are also informal in their way of communicating with us. But I think maybe they are just adjusting their way of communication as communicating with us.</i> (Sustainability Communicator – FCo.,)	Sweden-Sweden
<b>Building relationship</b>	<i>Meetings where you will meet physically and have more time to discuss issues in more details and get feedbacks from others during the meetings. But of course the minor issue is you can quickly solve... oh phone calls would be more adequate.</i>  <i>I would say "straight forward" through meeting, maintaining good dialogues with partners. What you always have to do is to focus on the impact side.</i> (Jorge Tiemeier – ICP)	Germany – Sweden and other partners
	<i>We also had lunch with him a few time. We tried to meet him in an informal way to build relationship</i> (Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)	Sweden-Ethiopia
	<i>We get along really well so we also share personal interest and other subjects as well. We have common interest and I like to be able to have personal connection to a person I work with. So it's fine.</i> (Sustainability Communicator – FCo.,)	Sweden-Sweden
	<i>I think when project shows the result, and we get to know each other also. So IKEA sees that WWF makes the progress on the activities that we decide that. And WWF can see IKEA still do really well in the workshop, they are telling the good things. That helps to build trust as well to show you are professional partner that you can work with.</i> (Louise Carlsson – WWF)	Sweden-Sweden
<b>Giving suggestion</b>	<i>"we maintain constant dialogues"; "maintaining good dialogues"</i> (Jorge Tiemeier – ICP)	Germany – Sweden
	<i>We tried to deal with it by asking him to delegate more</i>  <i>We adapt something with local condition so we design the model 70% Swedish and 30 % Ethiopian. So we make the model more hierarchical than in Gothenburg but still much more flat in Ethiopia.</i> (Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)	Sweden-Ethiopia

**Summary:** Information provided by interviewees were categorized, coded and labeled under the similar themes that they discussed and shared. In the following chapter, the author will analyze the challenges and the strategies project managers employed when working and communicating with partners in the CSR projects.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This chapter will analyze and discuss the result of the empirical study relying on the theories presented, which are Goal – Plan – Action Theory, Accommodation Theory, Hofstede’s Cultural Taxonomy, Hall’s High-and Low-Context Cultural Taxonomy and Media Richness Theory. Analysis will also tie to the research questions to identify the effective communication strategies in CSR project management under domestic and foreign partnership. In order to accomplish this aim, the author seeks to explore the challenges that project managers have to cope when cooperating and communicating with partners and how they manage these challenges to facilitate the CSR projects’ success. This chapter will be divided into two subthemes: analysis of challenges and analysis of strategies to give clear responses to research questions.

### 5.1 ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES FOR PROJECT MANAGERS WHILE WORKING AND COMMUNICATING WITH PARTNERS IN CSR PROJECTS

#### 5.1.1 COMMUNICATION MEDIUM

In the study of project management, Meredith & Mantel [59] deem that a project manager is a person living in the world of conflicts and dealing with conflicts more than most managers. Accordingly, Brandel [7] suggests project managers should be a good communicator to manage works productively. The study found that the interaction, discussion, persuasion and negotiation are so essential and frequently happen between project managers and partners during the process of projects. Since these are the ways in which decisions are made, problems are solved, and good outcome can be achieved. Business people can easily interact with each other nowadays. They can have physical meetings, or use communication media like phone, video conferencing and computer to exchange information, discuss and solve issues. All interviewees acknowledge the efficiency of communication in face-to-face meetings, where they can easily attract attention of partners, have more time to discuss the issues or get immediate feedbacks.

*“Always look at the efficiency of communication... meetings where you will meet physically and have more time to discuss issues in more details and get immediate feedbacks from others”.*

(Jorge Tiemeier – ICP)

*“Thus it’s more efficient”* (Daniel- Volvo)

*“They are really good and more efficient of course”* (Sustainability communicator – FCo.,)

Nonetheless, it does not mean face-to-face meetings are often applied and preferred in all contexts and situations.

**Communication medium** can be highlighted as a challenge for the project managers. Owing to far-flung geographical distance, frequently applying richest communication medium (*face-to-face meeting*) is unfeasible. The project manager of FCo., Louise of WWF and Jorge of ICP often meets with their partners twice per month, three times per months and twice per year, respectively. Daniel from Volvo often kept in touch with project partners by emails and phone calls. However, phone calls are inefficient because of the noise in the line in Ethiopia. In addition, the Ethiopian top-manager rarely took the calls; thus, he thought emails seemed to be a better choice. However, having to wait for a long time to get replies from the project partners is also inefficient. The pressure of time and budget did not allow him to keep waiting to get results; therefore, he needed to arrive with a solution. Consequently, if possible, he tried to arrange face-to-face meetings with top manager of Ethiopian company to discuss and get quick approval. In line with Suh [83] & Salmon [77], face-to-face meeting is one of the richest medium, allowing communicators exchange rich and immediate information. According to the Media Richness Theory, good matches between communication medium and the task affect the task performance [15b]. This theory confirms the practical data collected here. Matching communication medium with the tasks clearly impacts on the task performance of these project managers. The noise of the phone line in Ethiopia did not enable Daniel to transfer and receive clear messages to partners. Lack of understanding or misunderstanding is dangerous for project management. Gillard & Johansen [30] indicated that miscommunication results in mis-management of knowledge. Ipso facto, there is a call for a good match between communication medium and the task. Jorge, Louise and the sustainability communicator of FCo., shared the positive point of view on the physical meetings but they often keep in touch with project partners through emails and phone calls. They think emails and phone calls work well and adequate to quickly solve minor issues. For big issues, monthly or yearly meetings could help to discuss further, work on and make decisions.

*“We choose phone calls because I’m Helsingborg and she is in Stockholm so we can’t see each other so often. We meet every other month but we need to talk more quite often. We don’t use skype in (the company) so phone calls are convenient. Besides, we email quite often and I think it works really well”.*  
(Sustainability Communicator – FCo.,)

*“...phone calls would be more adequate”.*

(Jorge Tiemeier - ICP)

*“Emails and phone calls are quite convenient to discuss and get quick information before our meetings. They are much easier and cheaper and more convenient for minor tasks”*

(Louise Carlsson – WWF)

As we could see from three plausible projects above, interviewees perceive the effectiveness and the fit of communication medium with their project tasks. Task performance was obviously improved when Daniel met physically with project partner. He could send and receive instant messages to his project partner. Both emails and phone calls work well and efficiently in the context and situation of projects ran by Jorge, Louise and the sustainability communicator.

### **5.1.2 CULTURE**

Yet, it is a shortcoming or even mistake to assume good matches between communication medium and task can ensure good outcome of performance. The contexts, situations and partners per se are also the important influential factor. During the interview, Daniel constantly illustrated his frustration with different working style of Ethiopian project partners: *“First, you bang your head against the wall [laugh] a little bit because you got frustrated”*; *“You got very frustrated of course and go back to bang and you head into the wall again [laugh]”*

This frustration came from the fact he did not receive immediate feedback from the project partner. The top manager of the company rarely took calls while the managers below him did not have the authority to make final decision. Everything took time while the time and the budget of the project were limited. Even when Daniel did make an arrangement a long time ago, the planned meetings did not work as smoothly as he expected. The top manager kept cancelling and changing the schedules. When they finally met, the manager showed up one hour late. In addition, while at the meeting, the manager was busy answering his phone calls and left early with short notice.

*“He might show up 30 minutes later. The meeting doesn’t stop when it stops in the calendar. People need to finish discussing”*

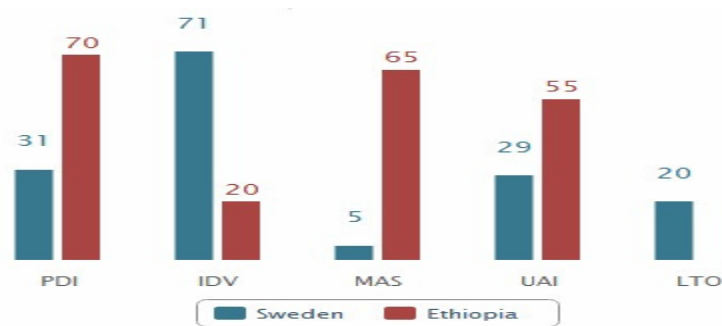
*“We went by car to client office building. Arriving there, we focused on making good impression because it’s the first time we met. We met his secretary, we got in the sitting room and we sat*

*down there and waited. Then nothing happened. No one showed up. We were sitting there for 20 – 30 minutes then the secretary came in and wondered if we wanted coffee. But “No” we asked if they would come. She said “yes yes they are coming”. Then we waited almost one hour and they showed up and came in with his supporters”*

*“The meetings started and lasted pretty long – 3 hours without any break. It’s terrible. I wanted water. I wanted coffee or to go to bathroom but as long as he was talking we had to sit there [laugh]. It was very tough”*

(Daniel – Volvo)

However, being prepared by a cultural training course offered by Volvo before the project started, Daniel could understand that the Ethiopian project partners might not purposely do it. Their organization is pretty hierarchical and that it is the kind of leadership style to show the power. He said: *“That is really different in different cultures”, “I don’t think they do that on purpose but it’s sort of the leadership style, showing that I’m really powerful, I will do what I want and you have to adapt to me”*



**Figure 1: Cultural dimension between Sweden and Ethiopia**  
(Source from Geert Hofstede’s office website)

In a comparison regarding cultural dimension between Sweden and Ethiopia made by Geert HofStede (<http://geert-hofstede.com/sweden.html>), we could easily see in the figure 1 that Power Distance (PDI) index of Ethiopian culture (70) is far higher than Swedish (31). This reflects Ethiopian society is much more hierarchical than Swedish. Hofstede creates Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV) index to evaluate the social relation on power distance dimension in different cultures. According to him, some cultures prefer to remain inequality in society and shows respect to people basing on their ages, wealth, education, occupation, personal achievement and so on. Thus, people in high IDV cultures do not questions or challenge authorities. It connotes that if someone is regarded as a superior, he/she can use the power to do

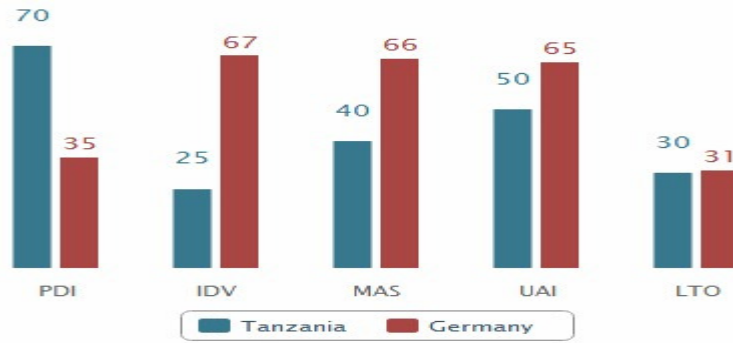
whatever he/she wants [55]. It spells out the attitudes and behaviors of Ethiopian top manager for showing up late, leaving early, answering phone calls, and working on other tasks at the meetings. He is the boss in the company, who has the highest power in that context. Thus, this is the reason why he did all things like that without any questions and challenges from others. *“But then his phone rang very loudly many times, he said sorry and talked for a while and came back to meeting. No one else did that of course. Everyone else turned off the phone but the highest manager in room had allowance to do that because he was the more important in the meeting”* said Daniel. Additionally, according to Hall T Edward’s cultural taxonomy, people from low-context cultures value time; thenceforth, time is highly structured and punctuality is a necessity. That is opposite with a high-context culture, where being 30 minute late might be still considered on time by people [55]. Classified by Hall T Edward, Sweden belongs to low-context culture while Ethiopia is categorized in the group of high-context cultures [55]. This can be a good explanation for the reason why Daniel found unfamiliar, frustrated and upset about the different working style of Ethiopian project partners. It is because he comes from less hierarchical and low-context culture as compared to Ethiopian. Figure 1 also exhibits the significant difference in Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS) index between two countries. Sweden gets 5 scores while Ethiopia gets 65. This demonstrates Sweden is a low MAS culture, denoting sex equality preference in this country. Opportunity for education and jobs are, thus, given equally between sexes which is opposite with Ethiopia.

*The man at the top, always the man there is not feminist, decided everything [tap the table].*

(Daniel – Volvo)

Similarly, Jorge also found problems while partnering with local teams in Tanzania. He realizes that this country is bureaucratic and its socialistic background creates unexpected problems and a number of shortcomings of the projects. As comparing to the cultural dimension between Germany & Tanzania of HofStede, the figure 2 shows that Tanzania has a high IDV index, reaching 70 scores while Germany just gets 35 scores. This explains the bureaucracy in Tanzania. It might be because this country is a hierarchical society where inequality is acceptable and questioning and challenging authorities are not common.

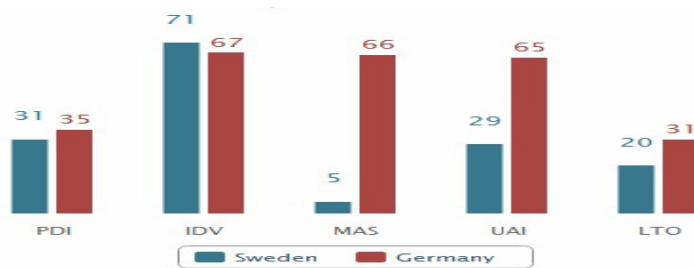




**Figure 2: Cultural dimension between Tanzania and Germany**

(Source from Geert Hofstede’s office website)

The considerable differences in IDV, MAS and UAI indexes could also be the cause for problems as shared. As worded by Meredith & Mantel (2000) culture of a nation will influence projects in many ways, such as time orientation, staffing, showing personal interests, gender and race bias, etc. That means sharing the similarities among cultures might facilitate or create less challenges for the partnership project management and vice versa. When asked about the partnership between ICP – Germany and Lofberg lilla AB – Sweden, Jorge expresses total satisfaction as well as the high appreciation toward his Swedish project partner. To validate the data, the author compares the cultural dimension between Germany and Sweden and finds that Sweden and Germany share similar concerns towards power distance (PDI) and independence of individuals (IDV). There are the substantial differences of Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) and Long-term vs. Short-term orientation (LTO) indexes between two countries. However, the interviews and empirical data did not reveal problems relating to these dimensions.



**Figure 3: Cultural dimension between Sweden and Germany**

(Source from Geert Hofstede’s office website)

Regarding the booklet publishing project and the forest projects that are partnered and managed under the same culture (*Swedish culture*), the project managers express the satisfaction and comfort in sharing personal interests and in discussing other subjects with the project partners.

*“It’s mainly about the works but sometimes other issues as well”*

(Louise Carlsson – WWF)

*“We get along really well so we also share personal interest and other subjects as well”*

(*The sustainability communicator – Fco.,*)

Contrarily, Daniel and Jorge only zero in on the tasks but not other issues when meeting and communicating with partners from different cultures. As pointed out by Dallio and Thuillier [23b] the quality of communication among stakeholders and the interpersonal relationships is a crucial factor to foster the success of projects. Hence, **culture** can be considered as another challenge of a CSR project manager when working and communicating with foreign partners.

### 5.1.3 INDIVIDUALS

Again, this study will be deficient if it only mentions about cultural challenge but not individual challenge. People are different from each other regarding personality, vision, objective, experience, expectation, background and interest, for example. So, **Individuals** should be considered as another challenge of project management under partnership as well because it is also the factor that impacts the relationship and task performance.

*“The challenge is that I can’t go and visit the project... Also, the person in IKEA that I communicate with is much more senior than I am. I’m just junior so there is a big gap about knowledge and experiences between us”*

(Louise Carlsson – WWF)

*“Well, my experience is that the cultural differences are no longer important... From my point of view, no major problem with cultural differences”* (Jorge Tiemier – ICP)

*“There is one more thing I’d like to emphasize that we can’t forget about individuals here. I mean we talked about cultures, sitting and meeting all the time. Ethiopians are like this and Swedish are like this but actually I think we can value a lot about individuals as well. In one*

*cultures individuals can behave in really different ways so I think it's dangerous to just talk about us and foreigners, this culture and that culture'' (Daniel – Volvo)*

Jorge and Daniel shared the same view about the cultural issue. They both think cultural differences are not a major problem in CSR project management under foreign partnership. Accordingly, individuals as confirmed by Daniel are such a big and influential challenge in the CSR project management. Louise assumed that the big gap of knowledge and experiences between her and the project partner is a big challenge. With cultural differences, high awareness, adaptation and adjustment of behaviors and actions to suit with others can help. But for the knowledge and working experiences, they are not factors that can be adapted or improved immediately. It requires time and the capability of individuals per se to learn and develop themselves. Additionally, Meredith & Mantel [59] in their research about project management also indicated that differences of goals, expectation and uncertainty of individuals engender conflicts. The longer the conflicts exist, the harder project management will be.

#### **5.1.4 COST AND TIME**

Another challenge that could be highlighted here is **cost and time**. Three interviewees experienced pressures about cost and time at different levels when undertaking those projects. FCo., is a cost-conscious company. They have no budget for the articles in the booklet project while their booklet project partner wanted them to pay for such kind of things. This made the sustainability communicator, who works for FCo., find it a bit hard to work with the partner due to unfamiliar policies and priorities of companies. Normally, dissension brings about problems and discussions. If the trade-offs could not be attained quickly, conflicts will arise and the project will transparently be difficult to continue and complete. Daniel experienced pressure in a different way. He managed the project with its own timeframe and budget; nonetheless, their strictness became a challenge for him to guarantee the progress of project without over-spending. Because this was a partnership project, the progress of the project that influenced the cost of project depended greatly on the partner's cooperation. ICP's sustainable coffee production project was funded by private and public partners. Jorge felt comfortable using funds for good objective of the project. Nonetheless, the demand for immediate solutions/ impacts also created pressure for directing and coordinating this project. Basing on the aim of study, the author

relates to relevant theories (*interpersonal communication, intercultural communication and media richness theory*), which might impact on the partnership communication in CSR project management, to analyze the collected data. However, as gathering data, cost and time emerged from the empirical data as a challenge for CSR projects managers. Study found that working under such kind of pressures obviously impacted the communication between the project managers and their partners. Without managing effectively the purpose of project can be hardly achieved. This is strengthened by the argument of Meredith & Mantel [59] in their research about project management, which emphasizes the importance of three main factors: cost, time and performance in a project.

**Summary:** As analyzed above, challenges for the project managers as partnering and conducting CSR projects are communication medium, individuals, cost and time. In addition, for the project management under foreign partnership, culture is also seen as another challenge as well. Though these challenges all constitute the important impact on the partnership communication in CSR project management, cost and time is the most influential challenge. The strictness and complexity of cost and time cause stress and pressure on the CSR project managers. In addition, there are challenges from individualities. Projects are managed and coordinated by people; so, when there are big gaps and conflicts among individuals, it is hard to continue works and ensure a success. Communication medium and culture are supplemental factors influencing the project management.

## **5.2 ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES TO FACILITATE PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND HELP PROJECTS ATTAIN GOOD RESULTS**

As we have known in the theory part, communication plays a critical role in cooperative work. Also, interpersonal communication is known as a central unit of every communication. Thenceforth, in order to figure out the strategies of project managers as dealing with challenges and communicating effectively with partners in a CSR project, the author will analyze the communication strategies in the communicative form of person-to-person. However, as indicated previously, culture, the choice of communication medium and individuals per se are also the influential factors over the form of person-to-person communication. Hence, they will be discussed and analyzed in this part as well.

Baxter & Braithwaite [4] analyze and demonstrate that cost, time and performance are three top important elements of a project. Though stakeholders of a project have dissension about these three factors, the final and holistic objective is the success of the project. Thus, it can be said that the interaction between the project managers and partners are a goal-driven process. According to Goal-Plan-Action (GPA) Theory formed by Dilliard in 1990 [4], goals create plans, which later determine behaviors (Action) to accomplish goals. However, unlike normal projects the objective of CSR projects is not only the success of project, which provide added value for society and stakeholders [76b] but also favorable reputation of the company, which helps to increase competitive advantages, enhance reliability, impact consumers' purchase behavior, attract qualified staffs and grow commitment of current employees [41, 28, 40, 58, 6, 19, 13, 63b]. According to Morsinga et al [63b], customers assess the reputation of a company committed CSR basing much upon the viewpoint of stakeholders while stakeholders are rather skeptical towards CSR communication of the company [23c]. CSR project partner is one of key stakeholders of company; consequently, CSR project managers get much pressure than normal project managers as managing the partnership projects. It has huge influence on CSR project managers' goal-action-plan strategies while working and communicating with partners. In this part, the author is going to discuss and analyze the plans (Preparation) and actions (Adaptation/ Adjustment) made by the project managers which then reflects their goals of project performance. These can be seen like their strategies applied to deal with challenges and facilitate project management.

### **5.2.1 PLAN/ PREPARATION**

For the management consulting project, Daniel was offered a cultural training course by his company whereby he could have more cultural knowledge to work with foreign partner. Before meeting with partner, besides the task materials preparation he also planned how to dress and communicate with partners. We can say that conversation management goals concerning impression management and face [4] constitutes dressing plan of Daniel. As he said, he often tried to dress like the clients. Due to the thought that Ethiopia is a hot and poor country, Daniel wore casual clothes at the first meeting with partner in Ethiopia. For other interviewees, they all prepare task materials like PowerPoint, documents and so on and even exchange some of them beforehand. As Dilliard said, GPA covers the idea that people always know what they are doing.

Giving the explanation to this action, interviewees said that they wanted to provide the partners the updated information so partners can have proper preparation before the meetings. Thenceforth, these actions are likely generated from the goal of sharing activities, promoting “joint endeavor between sources and target” [4:.67].

### **5.2.2 ACTION**

As shared by Daniel, despite the preparation the complexity of the project as well as the different working style of the project partner from Ethiopia frustrated him. However, being upset did not help resolve problems. Thus, he learned to accept things and tried to adjust and adapt with the way of working of the partners. A sequence of behaviors was generated from the primary goals. Regarding to the goal of impression management and face, Daniel wore the casual clothes during the meetings with Ethiopian partners but when the partners showed up in suits all the time, he adjusted and came back in suit again. According to Communication Accommodation (CA) theory made by McCroskey & Richmond [57] people adjust their communication style to be similar to others (convergent) to gain approval or different (divergent) to others to show their certain position & goodwill. Here, Daniel changed his way of communication, such as calling them by Mr. and first name to show his respect, adjusting dressing style to show the adaptation with partner’s business culture.

*“In Ethiopia, when you want to be formal you have to say Mr and first name. That’s very strange at least to me. It sounds like I’m formal and informal at the same time. It’s very strange but to them that how they wanted. So you learned that and you learned a lot of other things”*

(Daniel – Volvo)

When emails and phone calls did not seem work out, Daniel tried to set up face-to-face meetings with his project partners. He also learned to book the meeting ahead of time to avoid the cancelation and delay that might be made from the partners. It can be said that the goal of gaining permission and approval determined his actions. This can be seen as the cultural adaptation in Ethiopia. In order to save the face of the manager at the middle of hierarchy, Daniel still consult him even though he knew that the final decision could not be made at this level. The goal of saving face and making people happy facilitated his project management.

Similar to the project of Daniel, an adaptation of informal communication style is also applied in the booklet publishing project and forest projects.

*“With that NGO, I feel they are also informal in their way of communicating with us. But I think maybe they are just adjusting their way of communication as communicating with us. So it’s informal. I can sense that their organization is a bit formal than we are. So I’m guessing that when they communicate to others, it can be a bit formal”*

(The sustainability communicator – FCo.,)

*“Ikea is known for informal when it comes to clothing. It’s not often they have jacket or suit. And people I have contact with are forest people so it’s more casual”* (Louise Carlsson – WWF)

According to Laios Athanasios [51] communication is one of the most important functions of management. Trust is seen as foundation for all communication and relationship [90]. In line with Davide and Gerhard [18], people regularly communicate and share information when they trust each other. So, with the aim of facilitating the partnership, the project managers also strive to build trust with partners.

*“We also had lunch with him a few time. We tried to meet him in an informal way to build relationship”*

(Daniel Zackrisson - Volvo)

*“We get along really well so we also share personal interest and other subjects as well. We have common interest and I like to be able to have personal connection to a person I work with”.*

(Sustainability Communicator – FCo.,)

*“Concerning to trust is really serious. You need to very well assess what is behind such problem and how you can correct such a relationship.... Well we maintain constant dialogues; we have internal reports of course to funding partners”*

(Jorge Tiemeir– ICP)

*“I think when project shows the result, and we get to know each other also. So IKEA sees that WWF makes the progress on the activities that we decide that. And WWF can see IKEA still do really well in the workshop, they are telling the good things. That helps to build trust as well to show you are professional partner that you can work with”*

(Louise Carlsson – WWF)

As we could see above, CSR project managers had to set up goals, plans and actions to adapt with the different working styles of project partners. Daniel from Volvo tried to adapt with the formal working style of Ethiopian partners while Louise from WWF was in opposite position of adapting with informal style of IKEA partner. This is similar to the cases of Jorge from ICP and the NGO partner of the furniture company. In term of normal partnership, it's understandable that both sides should equally adapt working styles of each other to manage the joint work efficiently. But in the CSR projects perceived by companies as “primary driver for achieving a favorable reputation” [63b:9] which is then dependent much on the opinions of project partners, one of key stakeholders of companies, there is a difference and small inequality in power in this kind of partnership. Though companies launch CSR projects with the good aim of contributing to society and environment, the reputation of projects in particular and companies in general is not only subjective to the success of project but also the opinion of project partners. Thenceforth, CSR project managers had to try the best to impress partners, build trust and relationship to not only facilitate project management but also maintain good impression whereby reputation of companies would be strengthened. Due to this dependence, inequality as well as the skepticism of stakeholders towards CSR communication of companies, CSR project managers had to take high awareness about the cultural differences, individual factors and the choice of communication medium more than any other project managers.

With these strategies, the projects here basically gain good outcome. The management consulting project managed by Daniel was completed on budget. There was more than six month delay but it is because of the high workload of the client's side. Importantly, the project designed the modern management process for the Ethiopian partner.

*“They prefer clear hierarchy so they found some changes strange. We accepted some things. We didn't drive over them completely. We adapt something with local condition so we design the model 70% Swedish and 30% Ethiopian. So we make the model more hierarchical than in Gothenburg but still much more flat in Ethiopia” said Daniel*

Similarly, the sustainable coffee production project also achieves its goals. More than 2,000 Tanzanian famers and their families have better lives due to the project. Especially, as shared by Jorge, the project has helped to improve the sustainable agricultural practices, establish access to



financing options and inputs, and set up 10 coffee nurseries as commercial businesses on farmer group level in order to improve the supply of reliable planting material and strengthening the position of women in management of farmer in Mbozi, Tanzania.

Cooperated from 2002, the partnership between WWF and IKEA on the forest projects has been maintained and developed. As shared by Louise, the forest project contract is normally renewed every three years and this is the transparent evidence for a strong and stable partnership between them.

*“We started to work together with IKEA on forest projects in 2002. We have 3 year contract so every third years we are negotiating and discussing how we continue. So we just resigned the work state. We did it in June 2011. So now we are working for one year of three years. So project will end in June 2014”*

(Louise Carlsson – WWF)

The booklet publishing project hasn't completed yet but the satisfaction on the partnership shared by its project manager indicates good partnership between them and there is no problem with project management.

To sum up, the previous part shows the challenges of managing a CSR project under partnership are communication medium, culture, individuals, cost and time. They all impact the project management at different levels and require special strategies from the project managers. As demonstrated, communication is the foundation of management. However, in spite of the domestic or foreign partnership, the communication between the project managers and partners are the form of person-to-person communication. The shared strategies match with interpersonal communication, concretely GAP and CA theories. The project managers set up plans, which determine their actions in order to achieve their goals. Since communication medium and culture are factors impacting the partnership, they are all involved the process of setting up goals, planning and performing.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the answers to research questions and contribution of study will be presented. Also, the author will discuss and propose suggestions for further study.

## 6.1 ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The results show that even though some of the interviewed project managers are satisfied with their CSR project partnership, there are complexities in the CSR projects. The project managers have to deal with many challenges while managing the partnership projects. Based on shared information, the data were categorized, coded and labeled into similar themes (*communication medium, decision making, working style, gender bias, individuals, cost and time*). The analysis pointed out that communication medium, individuals, cost and time are influential challenges in the project performance under the domestic and foreign partnership. Culture is seen as another challenge as well when it comes to foreign partnership. The analysis also demonstrates that national culture differences between project managers and partners influence their communication such as the option of communication medium, decision making process, working styles and gender bias.

Cost and time are important issues of project. When they are really tight and strict, project managers suffer high pressures to warrant the projects on time and in budget. The project managers will have to work hard to manage and direct resources and staffs. However, there are many factors impacting and influencing project management under partnership, especially in CSR field when not only the success of projects but also the opinions of partners affect the reputation of companies. Meanwhile, as the argument made by Morsinga and colleagues [63b] partners are pretty skeptical toward CSR communication of companies. Thus, it requires CSR project managers make a good choice of communication medium which help transfer messages precisely and efficiently and avoid misunderstanding or lack of understanding which might not only damage the success of projects but also the reputation of companies. According to media richness theory, a good match between task and communication medium affect the task performance and the empirical data demonstrates this theory. However, it is not enough to affirm that a best fit between tasks and communication can guarantee the achievement of CSR projects. As exhibited by cultural taxonomy of Hofstede and Hall as well as the empirical data, the differences of cultures affect the choice of communication medium, decision making process, communication styles and working styles or even gender bias between males and females. This calls CSR project managers to be aware of cultural issue more than any other project managers to set up and improve relationship, communicate effectively with partners whereby facilitate the

project management and harvest good impression from partners. However, since people are different and no one is alike; the project managers should highly consider the individual factor. The skeptical characteristic of CSR partners demands CSR project managers to be aware of not only the transferred information but also the method to transfer it. Consequently, the CSR project managers should apply Goal-Plan-Action theory in the form person-to-person communication, setting up goals and plans for their actions to finally gain the overall objectives set forth. In order to do so, applying the accommodation theory, meaning that the project managers have to learn, flexibly adjust and adapt their actions with each situation and each partner, is suggested. All interviewees in this research applied flexibly their communication strategies and help those CSR project gained the considerable success. The study figured out that the combination of intercultural communication, intercultural communication and media richness theories is their strategy as working and communicating with partners of CSR projects.

## **6.2 CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

This study identifies the challenges CSR project managers experience and sheds light on the effective communication strategies for CSR project managers when managing projects under domestic and foreign partnership. It also provides strategies to deal with the challenges they experience and how to facilitate project management, based on the combination of intercultural communication, interpersonal communication and communication medium. This study suggests that the project managers should set up goals and plans to generate or adjust adequate actions toward individuals they work with, cultures they are in or the requirement of the tasks they are responsible. As Ruuska [66] stated, over half of problems of corporate project management derive from poor communication. So, communication strategies of successful CSR project managers in this study could help provide insight for failed CSR project managers improve their management in upcoming projects.

In future research, it would be interesting to investigate what challenges a project partner experience in the communication with a CSR project manager. It was not the aim of this study, but in future research, it may shed light on additional factors that could add to the communication strategies for CSR project managers. In future study, it would also be interesting to use the themes evolving from the data in this study for a quantitative study, to for example

find out what causes most problems in this kind of context among the themes revealed in this study.

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## 8. APPENDIXES

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### I – Introduction:

I'm doing this research for my master thesis at Gothenburg University. My aim of research is to outline and analyze challenges CSR project managers face and the strategies employed in communicating with partners in CSR projects. Basing on collected data, the study will identify and shed light on the effective communication strategies for CSR project managers managing projects under domestic and foreign partnership. Consequently, the study contributes more insight for CSR projects' stakeholders so that they can improve their performances in practice. Thus, I would like to interview you to explore how, when and why you communicate with domestic/ foreign partners during the process of a CSR project and what are the communication challenges for you while cooperating with them.

All the information you provide here in this interview will be used for this research only and will not be shared with anyone outside of the project. Also, if you like, your name will not be mentioned in the research to ensure no one can identify you through those answers. The interview will take place for about one hour and I would want to ask for permission to do audio-recording during interview to save data and analyze latter on. Since it can help me avoid distraction due to taking note at the same time and pay fully attention to your story.

That is all information I would like to provide at the beginning of the interview. Do you have any

question?

## II- Opening questions

1 – **Please tell me about your work and your professional background?**

Probe: age/educational background/ position/seniority at work

2- **What are your daily activities you do at work?**

3– **Can you please share about a project under CSR engagement having domestic/foreign partnership you have been responsible for?**

Probe: purpose of project/ place/time/ budget/ schedule/ staffs/ partners

## III- Key Questions

4- **What are your responsibilities in that project?**

6 - **Have you ever been to country of your foreign partner before this project planned and implemented?**

Probe: Yes-> experience/ lesson learned

No-> any info learned by self or shared by others

7- **How are your experiences when cooperating and communicating with project partner?**

8- **How did you get the contact of your foreign project partner?**

Probe: boss, colleagues, yourself....

9- **How did you contact him/her at first?**

Probe: Phone/email/ fax/ video/ face-to-face meeting or ?

10- **Why would you choose that instead of something else? Or what did you think when partner chose \_\_\_ ?**

11- **How was the interaction?**

Probe: place/ time/ language (formal vs. informal)/ clothes/ body languages/ content/speaking & writing style/ special expression to use and avoid

12- **When did you first meet your project partner?**

13- **What was your expectation?**

14- **How did you prepare for the meeting?**

15- **How was the first meeting?**

Probe: place/ time/ language (formal vs. informal)/ clothes/ body languages/ content of conversation/

16- **What was your first impression about your project partner?**

Probe: communication style/ working skills/ attitude

17- **How often did you communicate with him/her in the process of project?**

- 18- During the project, how often did you contact each other?**  
Probe: Phone/email/ fax/ video/ skype/ face-to-face meeting or else?
- 19- Why was skype/ phone/ email/ face-to-face meeting/ etc chosen for your interaction?**
- 20- What were the reasons for you to contact him/her?**  
Probe: gain assistance, give advice, share activity, change orientation, change/maintain relationship, obtain permission & enforce rights and obligation.
- 21- How were the interactions when you wanted to \_\_\_\_\_?**  
Probe: place/ time/ communication means/ language (formal vs. informal)/ clothes/ body languages/ normal/ challenges/ difficulties (*language barrier/ technical problem/etc*)
- 22- What were the challenges for you as conducting that project?**  
Probe: Lack of trust/ Different background (*knowledge, values, interest, outlooks, expectation, experiences, skills, etc*)/ Risks/ Cultures
- 23- Was there any problems arising during the process of project? If yes, what were they?**  
Probe: conflicts, different opinions about schedules/priorities/labor/ procedure/ cost/ personality/
- 24- How did your partner react in those projects?**  
Probe: verbal and non-verbal communication (tone of voice, gestures, etc)
- 25- How did you handle them?**
- 26- How did you manage trade-off/ persuasion/ negotiation?**  
Probe: Goal setting/ situational knowledge/ communication skills

#### **IV- Closing Questions**

- 27- This is all my questions, is there anything that you want to add?**
- 28- Thank you very much. If there is something that I want to clarify, is it ok if I contact you through email**