

# The good and the bad: the impact of diversity management on co-operative relationships

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**Abstract** This paper explores the consequences of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships. It postulates two different modes of co-operation: ‘community based co-operation’, based on the need to belong, and ‘complementary co-operation’, which seeks to harness strategic resources. These modes are combined with six dimensions of cultural diversity to create a cross-analysis framework. This framework forms the basis of our analysis of the interaction between cultural diversity and co-operation. Counter-intuitively, the study of France Telecom Mobile and Orange UK’s integration team suggests that cultural diversity has little influence on issues of identity involved in co-operation. However, it reveals a strong link between cultural diversity and strategic rationale. The findings suggest that cultural diversity should not be understood as differences between stable sets of values and norms, but rather as a way to explain inter-individual difficulties. We then propose factors that are likely to influence the impact of cultural diversity.

**Keywords** Co-operation; cultural diversity; case study.

## The impact of diversity management on co-operative relationships

Organizations and groups are rarely homogeneous. Members of teams differ from each other in many important ways, such as age, seniority and gender. Traditionally, studies of subgroup relationships have focused on domestic diversity issues (e.g. Allport, 1954). However, faced with the increasing inter-organizational collaboration of a globalized world, diversity management must address the confrontation of both national and organizational cultures, which we call ‘local cultures’. In joint ventures, cross-national mergers or even partnerships, cultural confrontation can affect co-operative relationships and may explain many of the difficulties experienced within these organizational arrangements (Chowdhury, 1992; Park and Ungson, 1997; Sirower, 1997). Alternatively, cultural diversity can also be a source of innovation (Adler *et al.*, 1996) and a driving force for co-operative relationships. This paper seeks to throw light on this dichotomy by analysing the impact of diversity on co-operation.

We built two distinct frameworks by which to assess co-operative relationships (Dameron, 2002, 2004). One form of co-operation develops from a strategic behavioural

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rationale, in order to gain access to differentiated resources: we call it complementary co-operation. The other form is generated by an identity-based rationale and the search for membership in a community, which we define as community-based co-operation. This distinction helps to delineate the research question: how does cultural diversity affect these modes of co-operative relationship?

Here, we elaborate a theoretical framework within which to study co-operative relationships in an inter-cultural context. First, we shall define the two co-operative relationship modes mentioned above. We shall then analyse cultural diversity with reference to the six culture dimensions we associate with the attributes of the two co-operative modes. This framework is applied to the case of the French–English team responsible for co-ordinating the France Telecom Mobiles/Orange merger.

In conclusion, we shall demonstrate that cultural confrontation affects complementary and community-based co-operation in different ways in the team studied. The former is hindered by stereotypes, while the latter is weakened by perceptions of injustice or inequity. Moreover, in the case studied, complementary cooperation is the operating mode most affected by cultural diversity: this diversity was always experienced by the team as a problem and never as an opportunity. However, this cultural confrontation was overcome and the group came together assisted by organizational mechanisms and procedures. The results bring into question the definition of culture as a stable set of values and behavioural norms, and highlight the representation of culture as a social construct. Furthermore, our findings help us to identify the factors that can reduce the major obstacles (stereotyping and perceptions of injustice) for teams within each co-operation mode.

### **Co-operation and inter-cultural management: moving towards a cross-analysis framework**

In order to offer a conceptual framework for co-operative relationships within an inter-cultural context, we first identify and define two co-operative relationship modes. An analysis of the literature on inter-cultural management shows that the impact of cultural diversity diverges as a function of the co-operative form studied. Therefore, we create a framework for the analysis of co-operation in inter-cultural situations by defining cultural diversity with reference to six key elements associated with the attributes of the two co-operative modes.

#### *Calculation or identity-based mechanisms: two types of co-operative relationships*

Co-operation, or working together, is central to sociological theories, as an expression of social connection. As co-operation is a collective action in its finalized form, it requires the conscious sharing of a common task between individuals in a relationship of mutual dependence. However, this social bond can also be analysed using a dualistic perspective (Durkheim, 1930), encapsulated by the distinction between the holistic and the individualistic paradigm. Applying this duality to an analysis of organizational theories, we detect two constructs of co-operation with an organization, which we define as *complementary cooperation* and *community-based co-operation*.

**The calculation at the heart of complementary co-operation** One form of co-operation is based on the differentiation between individuals and on the search for complementary resources. We call this complementary co-operation: it is the complementarity of divided functions, the contribution-payback nature of the relationship that encourages individuals to co-operate (Barnard, 1938). Here, the individual, in his calculating rationale, is central

to the analysis. The co-operation evolves in line with strategic modalities: it lasts for as long as the individual calculates that his gains exceed his losses. It becomes a field of strategic investment: the aim of co-operation for each participant is to gain access to resources complementary to those he already has (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977). The actor judges the appropriateness of resources based on their capacity to increase his control over an area of uncertainty that is crucial to the organization, and thus his ability to exercise power. Since complementary co-operation is based on calculation, the question of congruence of individual interest is central to its development. Each individual's opportunism necessitates the establishment of contracts that anticipate incentive, sanction and arbitration mechanisms and procedures, as demonstrated by agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976).

Thus, complementary co-operation is generated, within the sharing of a common task, between two individuals, each guided by a personal strategy of power acquisition through access to *complementary resources*. The *congruence of individual interests*, and thus the reciprocity of the relationships, is assured by *inter-individual commitments*.

**Social identification as generative mechanism for community-based co-operation** If complementary co-operation is based on the need for resources, it is the quest for identity that produces community-based co-operation. This form of co-operation is based on membership of a group with which the individual identifies. It develops through the construction, protection and defence of this perceived shared identity. Social identity theory (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and Abrams, 1999; Tyler, 1999) analyses the cognitive mechanisms underlying community-based co-operation. By a mechanism of auto-categorization, the individual himself defines the groups to which he belongs, the *ingroups* or membership group, and the groups he is against, the *out-groups*. An individual identifies with a social group when these groups' attributes seem most similar to the representation he has of himself (Dutton *et al.*, 1994), or when these attributes improve his sense of self-esteem (Pratt, 2000). Thus, the identification process is motivated either by affinity or by emulation. This individual cognitive process has two implications. First, the process of social identification does not imply a pre-existing common culture, or even characterized similarities between individuals in the same group. Within the framework of the self-categorisation process, it is sufficient that potential similarities are perceived or sought. Second, the individual does not identify with only one social group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hornsey and Hogg, 2000), although one ingroup may be more prominent than another, depending upon the context. However, considering Hornsey and Hogg (2000), social identity theory has yet to elaborate on the psychology of subgroup relations.

The other mechanism of categorization is that of social comparison. The individual seeks to maximize the distinction between the ingroup and the out-group in a way favourable to his membership group. The works on group dynamics (Anzieu and Martin, 1997) as well as those on the clan (Ouchi, 1980) enable one to clarify the idea of group within which co-operation is built. Co-operative relationships effectively emerge within more limited groups of less than a dozen people, where reciprocal perceptions are possible. These smaller groups include what one generally calls 'work groups'. These are notably characterized by the pursuit of super-ordinate goals.

Thus, community-based co-operation is established within a limited group, gathered notably around *shared aims* within a space of *interaction with other groups*, between individuals anxious to be *recognized* by the other members of the group as *being part of the same group*.

*Transversal dimensions of the two forms of co-operation*

Theoretically, three attributes define complementary co-operation: congruence of individual interests, complementarity of resources through division of work, and inter-individual commitments. Similarly, our theoretical analysis identifies three attributes that make up community-based cooperation: common aims, belonging to a group, and interactions with external groups. Thus, three dimensions appear to be transversal to the two forms of cooperation: purpose, interdependence and commitments (Table 1). This framework is applied to project teams in Dameron (2002). The analysis of interviews with members of project teams and the unfolding over time of interactions within a team has confirmed the presence of the two forms of co-operation and their attributes without which one appears to dominate the other (Dameron, 2002).

*Co-operation and diversity management*

To co-operate in an inter-cultural environment is an increasingly common experience. Our conceptual framework may highlight the connection between cultural diversity and co-operation. Within the theoretical framework of complementary co-operation, cultural diversity, as a source of differentiation, can be an asset. In the case of a pluri-cultural team, the members can exchange that specific resource: the fact of belonging to a foreign culture creates a zone of uncertainty from which one can profit (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977). This cultural diversity can therefore produce goal-oriented collective action. Theoretically, synergies should develop through the combination of normative and behavioural elements of the cultures represented (Adler *et al.*, 1986). Decision-making processes should be rich in multiplicity of perspective and solutions found more innovative (Watson *et al.*, 1993; Distefano and Maznevski, 2000). However, within the theoretical framework of community-based co-operation, cultural diversity can be seen as difficult to manage: diversity generates subgroups and exacerbates inter-group bias (Pettigrew, 1998; Hewstone *et al.*, 2002). It can engender weak social integration at a super-ordinate level and higher turnover (Milliken and Martins, 1996; Shapiro *et al.*, 2002; Jayne and Dipboye, 2004). In the case of an inter-cultural team, at least two reference groups are present: the cultural group as a subgroup and the team as a whole. At best, national membership does not interfere with the identification of the individual with the pluri-cultural team: the different in-groups coexist. At worst, members perceive the team as a threat to subgroup identity. This inclusion produces defensive reaction, and weakens a super-ordinate identification (Hornsey and Hogg, 2000). The strengthening of intergroup bias may then impede the development of community-based co-operative relationships at a team level.

It seems, therefore, that cultural diversity, in its ability to generate both creativity and intergroup bias, is double-edged. Complementary co-operation would be favoured by cultural diversity while community-based co-operation could be difficult to generate. The aim of this article is to explore the proposition that the controversy on the impact

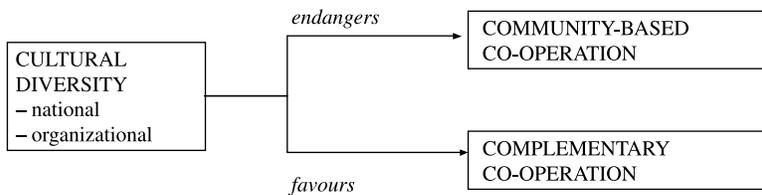
**Table 1** *The dimensions and the attributes of co-operative relationships*

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Attributes</i>	
	<i>Complementary co-operation</i>	<i>Community-based co-operation</i>
Purpose	Congruence of individual interests	Shared aims
Interdependence	Division of work	Belonging to the group
Commitments	Internal commitments	Interaction with external groups

of cultural diversity on team and organizational performance may in fact result from a rarely examined, dual conception of co-operation. Figure 1 depicts the propositions we seek to study.

For this, we must first define the dimensions that characterize the cultural diversity that exists between the members of an intercultural team. The identification of a culture's characteristics within key dimensions was the aim of a group of studies from the 1970s and 1980s, that established the field of the intercultural management (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Glenn, 1981; Triandis, 1982; Trompenaars, 1994). National cultures are compared in each of their dimensions, where their respective distance or proximity is assessed. This framework has been constructed specifically for national cultures. The reality of a pluricultural team, specifically in the case of a merger, is very complex: notably, it mixes the culture of the company and national culture, and the distinction between the both is difficult to operationalize (Vaara, 2000). This is why, while referring to the frameworks constructed and validated specifically for national cultures, we speak unthinkingly of cultural diversity for both national and organizational cultures. The invariable dimensions elaborated by the proponents of the realist perspective constitute themes of cultural differentiation. These dimensions enable one to list the divergences between the cultures present in order to analyse the impact of these characteristics on co-operative relationships. In an attempt to synthesize, Triandis (1982) identified 20 principle dimensions. More recently, the GLOBE project gathering management scholars from 61 countries reconceptualized nine cultural dimensions designed for the comparative study of leadership (House *et al.*, 2001). For the purpose of this article, we have selected and gathered six fundamental dimensions oriented to the cultural problems encountered by project participants.

The *relationship to time* is the variable the most often summoned up, although it covers different realities. Three types of relationships with time are suggested: the ability to carry out different tasks at the same time (Hall, 1976; Usunier, 1990; Trompenaars, 1994), temporal projection (Hofstede, 1980; Usunier, 1990; Trompenaars, 1994) and the value attributed to time (Usunier, 1990). The *relationship between the individual and the group* is another dimension particularly developed by intercultural management researchers. In line with the nature of the reference group and the socialization modalities, three ways of perceiving the relationship to the group have been suggested: the ability to identify with a more or less abstract group, like family or country (Triandis, 1982; Usunier, 1990), the hold, more or less strong, of the community over the individual (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars, 1994) and the degree of overlap between professional and private life (Trompenaars, 1994). The *relationship to rules* is a central dimension of intercultural management that breaks down into two fundamental types of approach. The works of Glenn (1981), taken up by Triandis (1982), Trompenaars (1994) and Usunier (1990), distinguish between the particularist and the universalist approaches



**Figure 1** Propositions on the impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships

to rules. On the one hand, the rule is defended in all situations (universalism); on the other hand, it is adapted to the context (particularism). This distinction infers two modes of relationship with another person: the first favours mediation via rules, while the second favours interpersonal relationships. For Hofstede (1980), the need for formalized rules and stable procedures responds to an inability of individuals to tolerate situations for which they are not prepared: he calls this relationship with rules 'intolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity'. *Physical and verbal interaction* is also presented as a differentiating axis. Three angles enable one to characterize these interactions. The spacial dimension provides the frontiers of intimacy (Hall, 1976; Usunier, 1990). The importance, or not, of context in the interpretation of communication is underlined by Hall (1976). Furthermore, Trompenaars (1994) distinguishes neutral behaviour from those that exteriorise emotions; he thus throws light on the use of humour, of understatement and of irony as compensation for the interiorization of emotions. Both last dimensions are related to power. The *relationship with hierarchy* is analysed by Trompenaars (1994) and Hofstede (1980). Each author has a different accepted interpretation of the concept. For Hofstede (1980), the 'hierarchical distance' reflects the acceptance of inequalities in the distribution of power. Rather than be interested in the degree of legitimacy of the hierarchy, Trompenaars (1994) focuses on its nature, which, according to the culture, can be based on status or on individual performance. The final dimension, referred to as 'masculinity-femininity', reflects the behavioural norms that prevail in the *division of roles* within a society (Hofstede, 1980). 'Feminine' societies are those that favour modest and altruistic values; 'masculine' societies, however, promote behavioural norms based on competition and confrontation. The relationship with conflict is, here, inherent: traumatising behaviour in feminine societies, or functional behaviour in masculine societies.

This study aims to analyse the impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships. Consistent with our dual framework of co-operation, this impact can be addressed differently. Theoretically, cultural diversity seems to strengthen complementary co-operative relationships, whereas it may weaken community-based co-operation. We aim to study these propositions in a field setting.

### **Research design and methods**

We seek to examine and extend our propositions on the impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships through the study of the connections between these two distinct theoretical frameworks. We chose the qualitative approach of 'theory elaboration' (Lee *et al.*, 1999). According to these authors, theory elaboration results in extensions to theory when 'pre-existing conceptual ideas or a preliminary model drives the study's design' (1999: 164) (e.g. Elsbach and Kramer, 2003). We do not seek to build a theoretical framework from scratch as in the 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) but to generate propositions based on an in-depth qualitative study (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Yin, 1994). Moreover, according to Ng and Tung (1998: 980), 'much of the published literature on the merits of workforce diversity is either theoretical or the findings of studies using laboratory/experimental designs. While providing valuable insights into the phenomenon at hand, studies performed in controlled settings may lack realism and, consequently, may have limited applicability to organizations in the real world.' Therefore, qualitative research methods can add new insights in the field of diversity management.

Furthermore, we adopt an interpretive stance, such that diverse meanings are assumed to exist and influence how people understand and respond to the objective world.

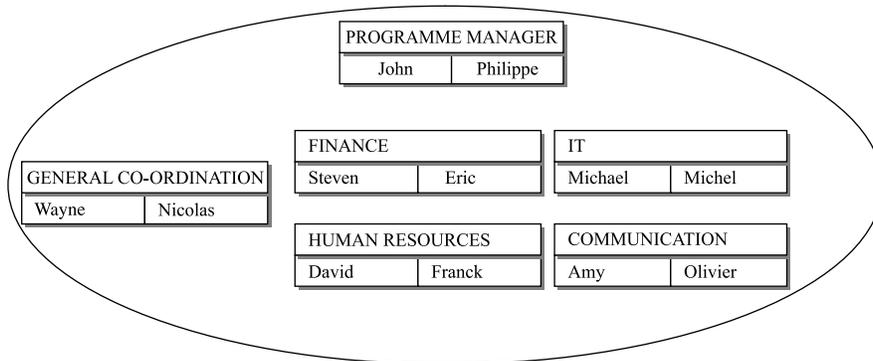
According to Gephart (2004: 457), interpretative research ‘describes how different meanings held by different persons or groups produce and sustain a sense of truth, particularly in the face of competing definitions of reality’ (e.g. Isabella, 1990). Rather than producing qualitative facts to evaluate hypothesis, this research seeks to understand members’ meaning of cultural diversity and the implications that convergent/divergent meanings hold for co-operative interactions. According to this view, culture is an ongoing interpretation process rather than a stable structure of values and norms where ‘real’ differences between cultures can be classified and be measured (Vaara, 2000: 82). If the literature to which we referred in constructing cultural dimensions is mainly based on this realist epistemology, it is as a convenient tool to categorize the stereotypes in the mind of the actors. By stereotypes, we mean accepted beliefs concerning reality and human nature, considering that these assumed cultural differences are enacted (Weick, 1995).

Consistent with the purpose of this research and our interpretivist stance, we rely on in-depth interviews of actors embedded in at least two social groups to generate propositions on the effects of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships. By focusing on the early months of the life of a cross-cultural team, this study stresses the moment when important precedents and patterns of interaction are set and when, notably, stereotypes are removed or reinforced. This period is relevant to understanding the effects of cultural diversity on the two forms of co-operative relationships, as well as the contextual factors that can moderate or reinforced those effects.

One case study can be sufficient to build propositions (Yin, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In fact, ‘case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universe. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a “sample” and the investigator’s goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)’ (Yin, 1994: 10). Accordingly, in case studies, the number of people interviewed is not necessarily connected to the issue of generalization. What is important for internal validity is the use of techniques of data triangulation, which is the gathering of as much as possible of independent pieces of information about the functioning of the team. Consequently, we have to perform in-depth interviews with all the team members and to gather information about the context. Moreover, the choice of the case depends on the scope of the theories involved. In our situation, it is constrained by two main necessities: team size and significant cultural diversity. The study of a small team, where one-to-one member interactions are possible, makes it easier to observe co-operative relationships. According to theory, project teams, in which different corporate functions are represented and where members are dedicated to a single, time-delimited project, are particularly appropriate for such study (e.g. Gersick, 1988). Within these teams, both modes of co-operation might develop: members are involved in inter-individual interactions and in-group phenomenon (Dameron, 2002). Cross-border acquisitions present the particular opportunity of a task force that is usually wholly devoted to the project, and that represents different nationalities. For this reason, we have applied the framework to the case of the integration team for the France Télécom Mobiles (France) and Orange (UK) (Figure 2).

*The context of the merger of France Télécom Mobiles – Orange and the integration project case*

The English–French setting provides an interesting arena for such study. Hofstede’s (1980) studies indicate that the assumed cultural differences between the French and the English people are significant. According to his results, France and England differ



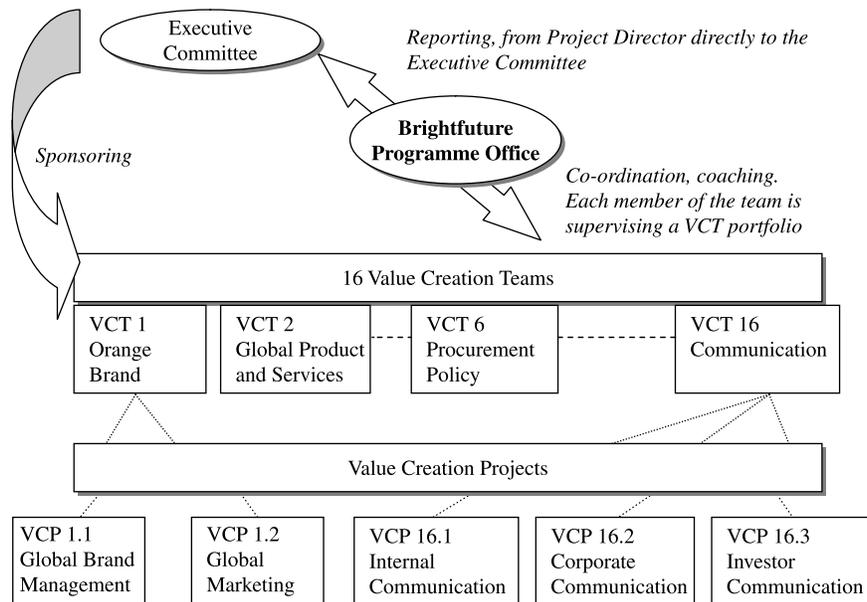
**Figure 2** *Structure of the integration team*

drastically in terms of ‘power distance’, ‘uncertainty avoidance’, and ‘masculinity-femininity’. It is only in the case of ‘individualism-collectivism’ that the differences are less significant. Consequently, our field should offer a small study group that includes significant cultural diversity.

Following a European Commission competition ruling, Vodafone sold its subsidiary Orange to France Télécom. The deal was announced on 30 May 2000, and from September 2000 a team was brought together from both companies, for one year, to implement the Integration Programme for the companies’ respective mobile businesses. The integration project, the ‘Brightfuture Programme’, was primarily inspired by the recommendations of an American consulting firm specialized in strategic and organizational management. The team was dissolved a year later. Although the aim of the project was to integrate more than 20 nationalities, only the English and French were represented in the team. Initially it consisted of six French–English pairings, including the team leaders, reflecting a simple balance between the representatives of each organization. Each pair, led by a consultant, had a specific function within the project, representing an expertise in the functional sense of the term. The project broke down into five integration missions: finance, technology, human resources, communication and general co-ordination. The pair responsible for the management of the project quickly felt apart. The English boss preferred to return to his original job, leaving the French boss alone as the head of an 11-member team: five pairs and himself.

The team’s work can be divided into two phases. Initially, its role was to define the integration programme, creating a list of projects and putting together corresponding teams. This involved the establishment of a VCT/VCP (Value Creation Teams/Value Creation Projects) structure (Figure 3). The team’s mission was to follow and structure the work of these ‘think-tanks’. Once these latter had presented recommendations and the executive committee had decided upon these, the team members then monitored implementation. Each team member had a particular role in the monitoring of the 16 major projects (VCT) and in sub-projects (VCP). Each member of each pairing chose the VCT that he would monitor with reference to his own skills and interests.

Therefore, the ‘Brightfuture Programme Office’ integration team was central to the interactions between the different entities involved in the project. It was like a ‘super project team’, responsible for the co-ordination of the whole programme. The nature



**Figure 3** Structure of the integration project France Télécom Mobile – Orange

of cultural confrontations that existed proved to be complex and often entangled, notably mixing national, organizational and professional cultures.

*Semi-directive interviews and secondary data*

In order to understand the impact of cultural diversity on co-operation within teams, we needed to collect elements relating both to the forms of co-operation and to the dimensions of inter-cultural management. The data collection mainly relied on semi-directive interviews. We carried these out after the disbanding of the team. Since the team members had dispersed, access to certain people was particularly difficult. The former director of the ‘Brightfuture Programme Office’ was the point of entry into the team, his training as a researcher facilitating an understanding of our project; the aim of the interviews – the production of a piece of academic research – was thus made very clear to our interlocutors. Of the 11 members of the ‘Brightfuture Programme Office’, eight could be interviewed: five French and three English people. At least one representative of each pair was interviewed. Of the three remaining members, one had left the group and two others were unreachable. We started by asking the interviewees to tell the story of the post-merger integration process. To deepen the context and to explore the three transversal dimensions of co-operative relationships, we then broached the following subjects: general background of the interviewee, purpose of the project, involvement of the team members and inter-dependency between members. We asked no direct question about either the cultural diversity inside the team or a specific form of co-operative relationships. We let the interviewees raise these subjects for two reasons. We did not want to assume that they perceived a cultural confrontation and we did not want to interfere with the way in which they experienced co-operative relationships. If they raised the subject, we encouraged them to develop these themes. The interviews

lasted between an hour-and-a-half and three hours. They were recorded and transcribed in their original language. We supplemented our knowledge of the project by interviews with participants of the VCTs, VCPs and the Executive Committee. In the end, 15 interviews representing more than 35 h of recording, provided most of the data necessary for the study. Moreover, the contextual data were collected from internal documents (flotation documents, internal journals, organizational charts, mission files) and a review of the press. The latter not only permitted a clarification of the strategic context of the mobile telephony sector, but also outlined the complete merger process.

### *The analysis*

Case studies result in massive data collection. The interviews represent 350 pages of text. To deal with this amount of information, we had to order the data by coding. The unit for text thematic coding is a verbatim. A verbatim is a sentence, a paragraph, often several, where the interviewee raises a theme. Coding consists of associating themes with chunks of texts (called 'verbatimim') in a database. It is done manually by reading the interviews and assigning codes to selected passages. In this case, and except for the last one, the codes are created strictly in accordance with the attributes of co-operative relationships and the dimensions of cultural diversity issued from our theoretical framework. A systematic coding of interviews was done following the coding scheme presented in Table 2.

The first code 'context' takes into account information detailing the organization environment and the professional background of the interviewee. The following six codes are related to complementary co-operation and community-based co-operation (as shown in Table 1): congruence of individual interests, complementarity of resources through division of work, internal commitments, shared aims, belonging to a group and interactions with external groups. Moreover, six codes deal with the six fundamental dimensions oriented to the cultural problems encountered by project participants: time, individual/group, rules, interaction, hierarchy, division of roles. Through the coding process, we built the verbatimim database on co-operative relationships and, where relevant, the effects of cultural diversity on it. A code is associated with a verbatimim when

**Table 2** *Coding scheme*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Context	Personal Organizational
Attributes of complementary co-operation	Congruence of individual/professional interest Division of work Internal commitments
Attributes of community-based co-operation	Shared aims Belonging to the group Interaction with external groups
Dimensions of cultural diversity Always coupled with a code on co-operative relationships	Time Individual/group Rules Interaction Hierarchy Division of roles
Intensity of cultural differences	Intensity of cultural differences

the interviewee deals with one of the co-operation attributes, coupled or not, as might be, with one of the intercultural dimensions. When a statement on cultural diversity could not be coded with a co-operation attribute, the verbatim dealt explicitly with the presence or not of this cultural diversity: a 14th code is created, therefore, called 'intensity of intercultural difference'. In order to have a shared understanding of the coding procedures, we coded the first three interviews separately and we compared our coding. More than for its results (the main purpose was not to make a quantitative thematic coding), it is for its process that the exercise has proved to be relevant: it allowed us to discuss our interpretations, to refine some definitions of the codes, to create the 14th code, and thus to undertake an initial analysis. We then went through the coding of all interviews with this coding scheme made clear. After this thematic coding, we performed axial analysis. The purpose of axial analysis was to reassemble data, which was fractured during thematic coding. Verbatims on a co-operative relationship attribute coded with a dimension of cultural diversity were analysed to detect explanations about the phenomena.

To manage the database, we used a qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo, which is specialized in the processing of qualitative data. To make complex searches in the database, it provides interesting features. It permits to point common verbatims between the codes issued from the attributes of the co-operative relationships and those issued from the dimensions of cultural diversity. Noting the co-occurrences of co-operative and cultural codes helped us understand the impact of cultural diversity on co-operation (see Table 3). We have also created two kinds of attributes in order to classify the code's verbatims: the nationality (English/French) and the function of the interviewee (Finance/Human resource management/Marketing/Communication/information system). It enabled us to compare easily the perception of the objective of the merger project between the interviewees depending on their nationality and their function.

In line with the aims of our research, we analysed the attributes of the two forms of co-operation, and the cultural differences explicitly seen by team members. We also sought to move beyond the immediate perspective of the actors on points of cultural diversity by comparing the remarks of the two parties on the co-operative relationships attributes. For instance, if no cultural confrontation was explicitly experienced by a member, it was useful to compare his perceptions of the project objectives. If people explicitly made statements related to a cultural diversity dimension, it was, in all cases, in relation to a confrontation or a difference. Furthermore, on each co-operation's attributes, we compared the statements in which there was no explicit confrontation between the two cultural subgroups. It revealed that if differences existed it was between professionals (e.g. marketing/finance) and not between cultural groups. We did not develop this point, as it is not the aim of the article.

### **Co-operative relationships and cultural diversity**

Through the study of the post-merger management of France Télécom Mobile – Orange, we have sought to understand the impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships. All the members of the integration team identified the two forms of co-operation; but it was community-based co-operation which was most discussed by the team members, accounting for almost two-thirds of the verbatims. However, this ratio is reversed in debates on cultural confrontation within the team: a majority of verbatims on cultural diversity dealt instead with complementary co-operation. Two major findings result from the analysis of the impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships within the team studied. First, counter-intuitively, the participants associated the

**Table 3** *Co-occurrences of co-operative and cultural codes (boolean)*

<i>Intercultural dimensions</i> <i>Co-operative relationships</i> <i>Type of co-operation</i>	<i>Attributes</i>	<i>Time group</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Rules</i>	<i>Interaction</i>	<i>Hierarchy</i>	<i>Roles</i>
Complementary co-operation	Individual interests	0	1	1	0	0	0
	Division of work	0	0	0	0	0	1
Community-based co-operation	Internal commitments	0	1	1	1	1	1
	Shared aims	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Belonging to the group	1	1	1	1	0	0
	External groups	0	0	0	0	0	0

1, presence of co-occurrence(s);  
0, absence of co-occurrence.

difficulties of cultural confrontation not only with community-based co-operation, but also, and above all, with complementary co-operation. Cultural diversity was experienced as a hindrance to co-operation, rather than as an opportunity. No participant represented cultural diversity in a positive, enriching light. Second, despite the confrontation between local cultures, the group came together. Group identification proved to be helped by the very structure of the group and by the elements of organizational context that were identified. Let us set out these results.

*Cultural diversity experienced as a hindrance to complementary co-operation*

Cultural diversity was experienced by the members of the team as a source of confrontation, never of innovation. The three attributes of complementary co-operation were affected by one or more critical dimensions of intercultural management and, conversely, all these dimensions, except 'time perception', affect this form of co-operation. More precisely, the relationships with hierarchy, rules, as well as modes of physical and verbal interaction, are seen as obstacles in the definition and implementation of these undertakings.

Participants systematically sent a negative image of the other culture when they broach the cultural question. For example, one of the French members of the team condemned the differences in the evaluation rules for 'deliverables' in favour of the 'French' methods, supposedly more complete. According to him, the English evaluate a result without elaborating on the way in which it was reached, while the French team wants, in addition to the result, to understand the method.

You suggest a project to an English person who has a definition of what he has, a financial plan and an analysis. And the French person will seek to understand how he did it. The English person will just look for the results, the external view: "I produce this. It will cost me this and I will risk that." He does not know at all how he is going to do it, how he is going to sub-contract it. Is he going to do it internally? He does not know how he will buy the machines. For the English, it will cost so much, it is enough. The French will try to understand a little more what has been done.

(Ex France Télécom Mobile)

Beyond the realist approach scholars, the analysis of the interviews highlights what we call the 'mirror effect' (See Tables 4 and 5). One community will find formalism or respect for hierarchy in the other one. In turn, the latter will do the same. These criticisms do not raise cultural 'distances', as measured by Hofstede. Their compared analysis rather stresses a reciprocal negative projection using the same *modus operandi*.

A mutual feeling of aggressiveness in the methods of communication emerges from these differing interpretations. This can be seen in the 'trials' which are established to test a partner's trustworthiness (Table 6).

If cultural diversity proves to be a source of confrontation rather than of innovation in complementary co-operation, in the end, the team members mentioned relatively few problems of cultural diversity in their interactions. Less than 20 per cent of team member verbatim dealt with cultural issues. This finding suggests that the construction of *intuitu personae* relationships, through a bicultural pairing, helped individuals to overcome cultural stereotypes.

The key to resolving cultural differences is first to be able to build relationships at the person level – so, it means working together – and secondly it is the time, and I mean, – that is very good cooperation between France and UK now – and the best that we need odd issue.

(Ex Orange UK)

**Table 4** *'Mirror effect' in the relationship with procedures*

<i>Former employee of Orange</i>	<i>Former employee of France Télécom Mobile</i>
They worked to the European law, a lot more than I think. I would say that the French in some ways – it may be because of France Télécom – seem to follow rules more, so this is the way we do, and tell people, this is how we speak to people, and there were sort of rules and procedures they follow, whereas I think historically within in UK has been encouraged to be a little bit more individual in what they do, to challenge the norms and procedures and there were slight differences on that . . . . I think they follow rules a lot more.	In France, we would go around the table, there we could not speak, except if we were asked – which meant that we would spend Tuesday making slides for Wednesday. I am rather formal, but on the condition that that formality harm the progress of the work. At the end, we had the impression that we passed a lot of time in producing papers, slides, copies . . . . The English were fonder of this formalist aspect than the French The French were more pragmatic. In France, we arrive at a meeting with an idea and each person can discuss it. The English arrive with an idea and the arguments to defend it, and they do not change their opinion.

*The group as a collective comes together, putting aside cultural divergences*

Questioned at the end of the project, team members recognized themselves as part of the integration team, with its boundaries and its specificity. This team proved solid in its relationship with out-groups. Its members shared common objectives throughout the integration project. The attribute 'belonging to the group' of community-based cooperation is the only one to be affected by cultural diversity. In this case, the divergences identified lay primarily in the rules and routines of the pre-merger organizations rather than in problems of national cultures. There were also contextual factors that moderated the impact of cultural diversity on community-based cooperation and allowed the group as a whole to overcome the perceived divergences.

**Contextual factors reinforcing cultural confrontation** For the team studied, two contextual factors reinforced the cultural divergences perceived by the group members: the difference in career management between the French and the English, and the choice of the working language, which was the mother tongue of one of the cultural groups. In these two cases, the contextual factors provoked a sense of injustice, of inequality and of lack of equity, felt by one of the groups.

**Table 5** *'Mirror effect' in the respect for hierarchy*

<i>Former employee of Orange</i>	<i>Former employee of France Télécom Mobile</i>
There is not so much of a hierarchy and this sort of 'less respect' if you've got a junior person talking to a director, they would say openly, and it is not necessary to go through that respect process. In France Télécom, there's probably more hierarchy and people had more respect for proposals whereas in UK you can make proposals no matter who you are. Yes, that would be the difference.	This is certainly connected to a stronger respect for hierarchy In England than in France. So, at France Télécom, the hierarchy exists, but one can not agree with a boss's idea. In England, the boss is right. Under the guise of being more relaxed, there is a deeply rooted hierarchy.

**Table 6** *The perception of aggressiveness*

<i>Former employee of Orange</i>	<i>Former employee of France Télécom Mobile</i>
<p>Within the French, they had to be more mandating on: 'this is the way we do it if we do it, and this is the way we act'. I think the English style is a little bit more buying. You know: "will you do this" rather than "do it this way" really.</p>	<p>There is always this idea of 'challenge'. For example, at a meeting, we are going to propose a project. The English, they will 'challenge that', that's to say, to attack it. They must see if it stands up to this, if they can accept it. The French will take this as an attack. We realize that there is some benefit to this, but it can be difficult to go through. It is the way they work, to be confrontational. They do it unconsciously, it really is a <i>modus operandi</i>.</p>

The differences in the recruitment modalities within the team presented a sticking point for community-cooperation. The French team had been recruited from the mobile telephony operational team, having to leave their original positions in order to join. The English members either came from a service dedicated to project management, or they were recruited in specifically for the role.

The advantage is that the people are mobilizable and that they know what project management is. The disadvantage is that it is one of many projects for them'.

(Ex France Telecom Mobile)

I still had my day job, I was almost an internal consultant to the programme office. And I think I was quite different because for everybody, it was a day job, they would have worked solely in the programme office and they did reporting to [the project director]. I never did. I kept the day job.

(Ex Orange)

As the project was nearing its end, the French were concerned about their career development, while the English knew that they would keep their previous jobs. Furthermore, during the project, the English were not 100 per cent committed to the project. The sense of belonging and the willingness to take risks were not therefore always the same.

From the French side, it was in February–March that they started to ask themselves questions about what would happen afterwards. We saw openings within the organization, but as properly brought-up individuals, we did not dare reserve the places in the organization that we had recommended.

(Ex France Télécom Mobile)

In the same way, the linguistic question was an obvious hindrance to integration within the group. The official working language being English, the French could use certain expressions clumsily and ambiguously. The French felt themselves at a disadvantage in defending their points of view.

It was a technical difficulty that I am afraid was not sufficiently understood by the English. There were very few English who spoke French. There were several. I must acknowledge that the managers made some effort to take English classes but, in spite of everything, they never achieved the level where we could hold meetings in English ... it was already very difficult for them to follow a meeting but in order to lead in English, it was all the same very difficult.

(Project director)

Regarding community-based co-operation within the integration team, the perceived differences are thus directly connected to the organizational and institutional context.

These differences produced a sense of injustice that hindered this form of co-operative relationships.

**The contextual factors for moderation of cultural confrontation** As far as the contextual elements are concerned, they influenced the perception of cultural diversity by moderating it. In this way, they assisted the development of community-based co-operation and the construction of the group. First, the existence of a common business culture played a moderating role of national and organizational diversity. The analysis of the perceptions of the project's objectives showed a common understanding of them and, more broadly, of the purpose of the merger. No cultural difference was mentioned on this point. The fact that all the team members came from the mobile telephony sector, along with their common objectives, facilitated a shared expertise that permitted the sharing of a same language. If some divergences appear regarding the hierarchy of merger objectives, they are between the professional pairings but not intra-pairing. Those differences are minimal. They exist more between disciplines than between pre-merger organizations. Professional culture takes precedence. 'As the whole world spoke about the same business, that sped things up' (Project director).

Second, the organizational and institutional recognition of the project also appeared as a generating factor of community-based co-operation. It helped overcoming cultural divergences. Close to 500 people actively took part in the integration process. The Brightfuture Programme team co-ordinated them all. The Executive Team was directly involved in the project. Financial and human resources were called upon. The integration of the two entities was widely broadcasted in the media and it became financial analysts' favourite stock. 'We had a feeling of pride for this new-born group. The market carried us. The future was radiant. It was quite exalting' (ex France Télécom Mobile).

Third, the consultants played an essential role in the construction of the specific social identity of the project team. They interacted frequently with the team members through coaching. Several nationalities were represented among the consultants. Neither the French nor the English nationality dominated. So no consultants of either nationality could be accused of supporting one of the cultures in the team. In fact, they helped overcome divergences. They promoted a well-balanced team, both in internal and in external relations. Since they supplied a management model for the project, consultants were not seen as specifically English or French. Furthermore, the presence of consultants provided an unambiguous definition of the boundaries of the team, which facilitated the sense of belonging.

The hard core was really 12. That is five English people, five French people, plus an English boss and a French boss. And we had gone even further, because for each, we had put a consultant: an English person/a French person/a consultant.

(Ex France Télécom Mobile)

**The integration team comes together** The sharing of the same expertise, unambiguous group boundaries, organizational recognition of the team and a well-balanced mode of management diminished feelings of injustice relating to the difference of treatment between the cultural groups. The team came together and developed co-operative community-based relationships. The perception of the relationships with external groups, notably the VCT and the consultants, was the same, whatever the nationality. The team demonstrated solidarity in its interactions with out-groups. 'Collectively, we, as

a team, would be pretty strict on having weekly meetings to say: this is where we are in the whole process' (ex Orange UK speaking of relationships with the VCT).

In the same way, the team identified with its project, constructed its own temporality and differentiated itself from the rest of the organization. 'Sometimes the integration process felt a little bit distant of what is really happening in the businesses. It was a bit apart' (ex Orange UK).

There was no rivalry. We were in some way outside the structure. It was a seductive element, the pressure was no longer the same. There was pressure related to the issues, to the timetables, but not an operational pressure.

(Ex France Télécom Mobile)

Thus, the team cooperated in spite of the cultural differences that, a priori, seemed strong: 'It was a little commando team' (ex France Télécom Mobile).

## Discussion and conclusion

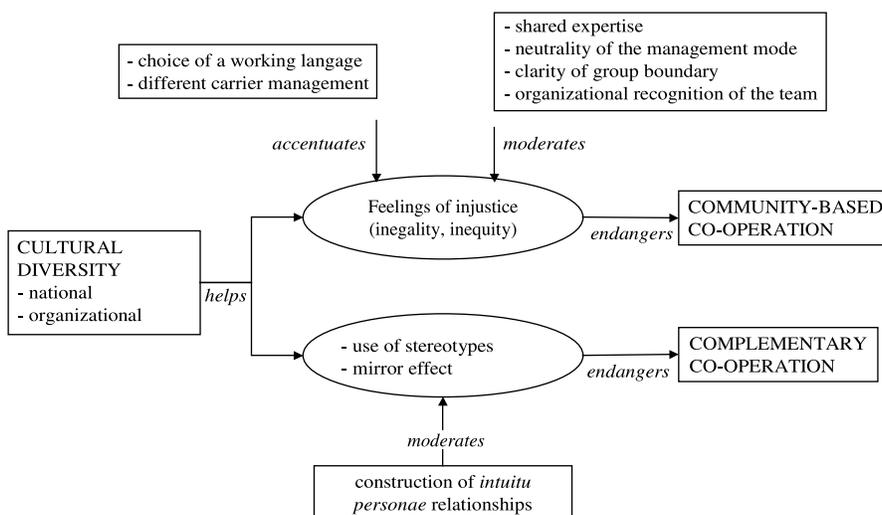
We sought to understand the impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships. Contrary to our theoretical propositions, cultural diversity was always experienced by the members of the integration team as a difficulty to overcome even, and above all, within the framework of complementary co-operation. It was never seen as an opportunity, a differentiation and a source of creativity. Yet the group came together and overcame the divergences displayed.

Cultural diversity affected primarily complementary co-operation. For the team members, it was an explanation of problems of internal functioning. More than a reality extrinsic to the participants, cultural diversity was an interpretation vector for relational difficulties within the team. Each projects towards the foreign group mutually perceived stereotypes as negatives. We call these mutual negative projections the 'mirror-effect'. Interestingly, this result contradicts the positions of the French and English cultures within the scale developed by Hofstede (1980). The definition of culture as a system of stable values and behavioural norms is called into question, to favour a representation of culture as a social construct. Following the Weick's concept of sense making (1995), we can enter the cultural referent into a process of presentation and interpretation enabling one to give sense to the action (Vaara, 2000). Since it is an undemanding explanatory referent for inter-individual relational difficulties, cultural diversity is a central problem in the management of co-operation. The aim of inter-cultural management, and more broadly of diversity management, therefore, should be to work on the actors' perceptions in order to reduce the risk of the use of stereotypes and the production of mirror effects. It is not a question of placing cultural groups within scales and analysing their distance, but rather of making explicit the stereotypes which can be used in participants' interpretation of their relational difficulties. The choice of work by professional pairing proves in the case studied to be particularly judicious. By relying upon a common expertise, the pair can move into an *intuitu personae* relationship, a vector for overcoming the use of stereotypes and for diminishing mirror effects. At the inter-individual level, this result is consistent with Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis: by promoting prolonged contact between groups, negative stereotypes of and attitudes toward the out-group is challenged (Tsui and Gutek, 1999).

Despite the divergences, the team studied managed to come together as a social group. The community-based co-operation seemed less affected by cultural differences than the complementary co-operation. Since the social identities are many, some managerial and contextual elements can help the team's identification processes and

enable it to overcome cultural divergences. The proximity of professional expertise present (Chevrier, 2003), the neutrality of the management models (Salk, 1996; Dovidio *et al.*, 1998), the clearly established group boundary, and the organizational recognition of the team’s mission helped promote the feeling of group belonging and the development of community-based co-operation within an inter-cultural context. At the same time, human resource management methods seen as inequitable between the two groups (Salk, 1996), or the choice of one working language to the detriment of the other (Salk, 1996; Chevrier, 2003) provoked a feeling of injustice which hinders co-operative work. In the discussion of results, the following propositions thus came out (Figure 4):

This research thus underlines the interest of the study of co-operative relationships within intercultural teams. The explicit management of cultural diversity allows one to confront the perceived differences before the implementation of proposed organizational solutions; it helps the construction of an acceptable compromise. Conversely, the absence of considered steps over this confrontation can hinder the overcoming of stereotypes and the quality of the compromises that are found. At the same time, the results call for an exploration of the relationship between the two forms of co-operation. Are the difficulties of complementary co-operation the result of problems in the development of community-based co-operation? Or the inverse? How does cultural diversity influence the relationship between the two forms of co-operation? Furthermore, we studied only one kind of diversity. It is possible to extend the analysis to other modalities: diversity of generation, of gender or even of profession. This article argues for an in-depth consideration of the modalities of co-ordination and of control within inter-cultural groups. If one single case does not allow for statistical generalisation, our results on the impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships could be employed as the basis for a multiple case study that could then lead to analytical generalization. This research field is even more pertinent because organizations must face not only globalization but also a growing diversity in their environments and their resources.



**Figure 4** *Impact of cultural diversity on co-operative relationships and moderating factors*

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