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FINNISH-FRENCH FUNDAMENTAL
CULTURAL ANTAGONISMS IN ORGANISING

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Finnish-French Fundamental Cultural Antagonisms in Organising

Key words: Cross-Cultural / Intercultural, Finnish, French, Antagonisms, Organising

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Abstract

Seeking to challenge the belief that within-West cultural differences should be seen as insignificant in organisations, this paper seeks to demonstrate how two given Western European 'organising cultures' (i.e. Finnish culture and French culture, as they are expressed in the process of organising) can contrast, if not conflict, with each other. Further, it aims to help the reader realise what kinds of fundamental 'cultural antagonisms' these contrasting organising behaviours may come from, to help her/him understand 'the other culture' better, and thus allow for a first step towards an improvement of Finnish-French intercultural interactions in organisational contexts. After shortly introducing what should be understood here as 'cultural antagonisms', the paper addresses four fundamental Finnish-French antagonisms, regarding the vision of the organisation ('functionalist vs. personalist'), the relative importance of 'consensus vs. dissensus', the typical trade-off between reliability and flexibility, and the striking differences in communication, respectively. These four fundamental antagonisms are found to be closely interrelated and integrated, serving as explanation, justification and legitimisation for each other. That does not mean, however, that differences, however striking they may be, should merely be a threat to co-operation: some implications introduced at the end of the paper suggest that, provided people are aware of them, cultural antagonisms can also be seen as opportunities for a more fruitful work interaction.

Key words: Cross-Cultural / Intercultural, Finnish, French, Antagonisms, Organising

Introduction

In nowadays' more and more globalised business environment, cross-cultural and intercultural matters attract a great deal of interest. Most of the current cross-cultural business research, however, focuses on a West vs. East comparison or opposition (see e.g. Björkman & Kock 1995, Johanson et al. 1999). This may indirectly cause a belief that within-West – or within-East - cultural differences should be seen as minor. Such a belief may be dangerous: it may not be cultural differences as such that cause the real problems in international co-operation, but rather their underestimation, which may create a significant gap between expectations and outcomes of the interaction. This underestimation is extremely common, especially in regions that are believed to become more homogeneous, such as the European Union. The very mismatch between how homogeneous the EU is perceived to be and how heterogeneous it actually is – despite evolving slowly toward economic and political integration - makes it especially worth studying as a context in which intercultural interactions occur.

The first objective of this paper is to demonstrate how two given Western European 'organising cultures' (i.e. Finnish culture and French culture, how they are expressed in the process of organising) can contrast, if not conflict, with each other. The second, more significant objective is to help the reader realise what kinds of fundamental 'cultural antagonisms' these contrasting organising behaviours may come from, to help her/him understand 'the other culture' better, and thus allow for a first step towards an improvement of Finnish-French intercultural interactions in organisational contexts.

For the comparative bicultural study that this conceptual paper deals with, the most traditional approaches (such as Hofstede 1980 or Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1993) will only be used as complements to more specific references in the spirit of Demorgon's (2000) insightful methodological thinking: the idea that an approach doing justice to the 'logic of antagonisms' – called the 'synchronic' approach - should be combined with a historical – or 'diachronic' – approach, and more broadly speaking, that a highly cross-disciplinary approach is needed to study cultural differences and 'interculturality'. This critical, content analytical literature review will indeed be based on authors from various disciplines within social and human sciences, and not only from business studies.

After shortly introducing what should be understood here as 'cultural antagonisms', the

paper will address four fundamental Finnish-French antagonisms, regarding the vision of the organisation ('functionalist vs. personalist'), the relative importance of 'consensus vs. dissensus', the typical trade-off between reliability and flexibility, and the striking differences in communication, respectively.

Values and Cultural Antagonisms

There have been many attempts at defining the notion of 'Culture'. One of the most renowned and recognised definitions of culture is that from anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckholm (1952, 181, as quoted by Adler 1997, 14-15):

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups [...]; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values [...].

In this definition, culture is chiefly understood as a system of values that are collectively shared in a social group. The individual's behaviour is supposed to be shaped by this system of values, in that some patterns of behaviour, and the values that lie behind them, are common to almost all members. Therefore, belonging to this social group will determine the individual's 'cultural identity', or rather, one of the individual's culturally defined identities – as the individual belongs to different cultures, at different levels (e.g. nation, social class, religion, etc.). Values consist in what is 'explicitly or implicitly desirable to an individual or a group' and what 'influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action' (Adler 1997, 15). Usually, rather than absolutely defining what is right and wrong, they only tend to specify general preferences, because they often enter in competition with each other. Values merely are 'priorities among codes' for conduct (Terpstra & David 1991, 8). Therefore, value conflicts usually do not occur because the values at stake are totally opposite, but rather because, in a situation of competition, one value will have priority over the other: it will not be possible to express both values at the same time, and the expression of the prioritised value will even be detrimental to the expression of the other value. Such

values can be described as ‘antagonistic’, simply because they turn out to be incompatible in certain social situations.

The term ‘antagonism’ comes from the Greek *antagonistes*, meaning ‘fighting (*agonistes*) against (*ant, anti*)’ (Demorgon 2000, 37). It thus implies a conflict, in which there is usually a winner and a loser: ‘the notion is then close to that of incompatibility’ (ibid.). However, there is, in Demorgon’s view, another meaning to it, which stems from the use of the term in biology, with an idea of ‘adaptive functionality’ (ibid.). This suggests that antagonisms are not fixed, that there is a room for adaptation. In actual situations, cultural antagonisms will easily be translated into trade-offs, with both the consciousness of some incompatibility and a positive shade of meaning linked to the possibility of a compromise.

In the spirit of this ‘logic of antagonisms’ (Pateau 1998, 150-154, Demorgon 2000, 33-70), the approach in this paper will be to underline relative bicultural oppositions that people are likely to perceive as ‘more absolute than they actually are’ because of their tendency to see only two sides – usually a good one and a bad one - of a given problem. The bicultural interaction is indeed of a dialectical nature, insofar as each part defines itself according to the other part (Fougère 2002); this comparison will be dialectical as well, seeking to discover the fundamental Finnish-French ‘cultural antagonisms’. All of these antagonisms are closely related to each other: the values at stake are, globally speaking, integrated in two antagonistic ‘cultural systems’.

The Organisation: Functionalist vs. Personalist Vision

Within the Western world, a North-South opposition sometimes makes sense in some respects. As argued by Amado et al. (1990, 37), cultural differentiation between North and South can be explained with the help of three dimensions: the contrast between the Germanic sense of community and the clan rivalry of the Latins, the difference between the Germanic Common Law approach and the Roman Law approach, and, certainly most importantly, ‘the Nordic emancipation of the Anglo-Saxons leading them to free themselves from the tutelage of the Roman and Catholic Churches, institutions which still continue to dominate Latin countries.’ First, it is clear that the clan structure of the Mediterranean family has always limited the development of ‘projects requiring

consensus and cooperative participation’, which have been comparatively successful in Northern Europe (ibid., 41). Second, Roman Law, as a servant of the state and its centralising force, allowed to strengthen monarchies in the South but a similar law was not possible to install in the North where other institutions – especially Common Law – already guaranteed a better balance of power. Third, Catholic religion, itself highly centralised and hierarchical, contributed to the reign of the absolute monarchies and, together with the State, ‘gradually dispossessed the local communities of the autonomy that they had hitherto enjoyed.’ (ibid., 40)

According to Amado et al. (ibid.), and because of these North-South differences as to the three dimensions described above, there are two distinct conceptions of organisations: the American style organisation, representing the North, and indeed very present in Northern Europe, which is ‘functionalist and instrumental’, and the French organisation, representing the South, which is ‘personalist and social’ (ibid., 5). The Finnish organisation model probably does not fit perfectly into that so-called American view of organisations, but it is much closer to it than to the French view. The main difference of conception here is that, in the Northern model, and in that case in Finland, the organisation is primarily conceived as ‘a system of tasks to be achieved, functions to be performed and objectives to be met’, whereas, in the Southern – French – model, it is above all ‘a social system bringing together a collectivity of persons around a project’ (ibid., 31). In other words, French organisations can be considered as much more people-oriented than Finnish organisations, which are fairly task-oriented.

There are many implications of this difference in the vision of the organisation. One of them relates to the organisation’s structure: in France, it will be ‘defined in terms of degree of authority and status’, while in Finland, it will rather be ‘defined in terms of activities’ (ibid.). That leads to the fact that the French organisation will chiefly consist in a hierarchy of persons to be managed in terms of who has authority over whom, while, in the Finnish organisation, one should rather deal with a hierarchy of problems to be solved, and according to that hierarchy, the need to determine who is responsible for what. In the Finnish context, authority will thus be a merely ‘functional’ attribute, ‘exercised in a limited, specific and impersonal manner’, while the French manager will exercise her/his authority ‘in a diffuse, all-englobing and personalised manner’ (ibid.). The French model could be described as one where authority is legitimised ‘by

ascription', while a legitimisation 'by achievement' would be more appropriate to describe the Finnish model (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1993).

French centralisation and hierarchy are well-known phenomena that are for instance represented in France's high score on Hofstede's (1980) Power Distance index. Finnish society in general is much more egalitarian, and in the typical firm 'hierarchical differences are played down.' (Lilja & Tainio 1996, 163) However, Finland is widely seen as the most hierarchical of the Nordic countries. In Nurmi's and Üskvärav's (1995, 52) opinions, 'Finnish organizations are more hierarchical and structured than in most Western countries'¹, which explains why Finnish organisation culture is allegedly best represented by the 'Eiffel tower' metaphor (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1993), just like French organisation culture. Koivisto (1998) demonstrates that Finnish organisational structures somehow lie in between German and Swedish ones, in that German organisations are more hierarchical (Tiittula 1993, 51) and Swedish bosses are less authoritarian (Laine-Sveiby 1991, 101) and share more responsibility with subordinates in the decision-making process (ibid., 92-99). Finnish decision-making is indeed personalised, and of the 'top to down' kind (Nurmi & Üskvärav 1995, 58, 60). Since the Second World War, paternalism has nevertheless given way to a more pluralistic system in Finland (Lilja & Tainio, 1996, 165), while in France, a great deal of old paternalistic symbols remain (Sorge 1993, 69): management vocabulary is still full of words derived from the Latin word *pater* (father), including *patron* (boss, employer), *patronne* (the employer's wife or a female employer), *patronat* (the employers' community or function), or *patrimoine* (cultural and agricultural heritage).

A principle that French and Finnish organisations, and societies, certainly address in very different ways, is that of Egalitarianism. Indeed, what is usually referred to as the French élitist system does not seem to be compatible in any way with equality supposedly being a central concern, as institutionalised in the famous triad *liberté-égalité-fraternité*. This élitist system is especially conspicuous in the overwhelming importance of the *Grandes Ecoles* as the educational *Voie royale* (a 'royal way') to success. For example, in France, virtually all top politicians have had to go through *ENA*, the 'National Administration School'. Nevertheless, in the French system, this is not supposed to be incompatible with the idea of equality of chances, since selection to

¹ This may be linked to the Russian heritage of Finland and the idea of 'Tsarism Bureaucracy'.

Grandes Ecoles is always made according to a large, usually country-wide, open competition, known as *concours*. As Sorge (1993, 73) argues, ‘such processes guarantee equality of access, and the *concours* provides a democratic foundation for hierarchical structures.’ This ‘meritocratic ethos’ yet does not guarantee that upward social mobility is easy in France, even though this phenomenon ‘is, for instance, more evident than in Germany’ (ibid., 79). To a large extent, ‘social reproduction’ remains the rule (see especially Bourdieu 1977). On the other hand, Finnish society is far less stratified, despite some growing social inequalities that have been observed in recent years. The educational system, in which the idea of *Grande Ecole*, through the name *korkeakoulu*, also exists, is yet far less élitist: there is no one *Voie royale*, and University is much more respected than in France. Similarly, however hard, the *pääsyttutkinnot* (entrance exams to universities, business or engineering schools...) cannot be seen as fiercely competitive and demanding as the French *concours* to enter *Grandes Ecoles*, which require at least two years of specific preparation and thereby have a more significant – sometimes traumatising – impact on students’ lives. This impact is all the greater so, that a person’s social status may be determined by whether this person has belonged to a *Grande Ecole*, and to what *Grande Ecole*. It is probably needless to state here that continuous education, while quite popular in Finland as a way to upward mobility, remains little valued in France (Sorge 1993, 81).

Very specific to the French system is the existence of *cadres*, people who form a distinctive social group and thus cannot be merely equated with ‘executives’ in the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the word. As Morden (1995, 36) puts it, the attribution *cadres* clearly excludes blue collar and office workers, foremen, but also directors and employers. *Cadres* generally carry out the most intellectual jobs, which happen to be as well ‘the most coveted’ ones in French corporations (ibid.). Their importance in society is tremendous, since they are a ‘powerful and influential collective entity’ and are seen as ‘trend setters and opinion leaders’ (ibid., 37; Barsoux & Lawrence 1990). *Cadres* obviously have no real equivalent in Finland.

It seems that the extent to which political dimensions of organisations are recognised is also closely related to the personalist vision of the organisation. In Laurent’s (1980) study, the French and Italians seem to be most aware of the managers’ political roles in society, unlike Scandinavians. Furthermore, Authority, Formality and Hierarchy, all

significant dimensions in France, are much more played down in Scandinavia. Yet, what Lotti (1984, 10) calls 'internal authority', which has to do with self-discipline, seems to be much stronger in Finland than in France. According to Lotti (*ibid.*, 11), it is related to a relative Finnish intolerance compared to France's exceptional moral tolerance, which allegedly may come from the nation's old cultural history. However, the younger generation always proves more tolerant than its predecessors, and Finland is no exception (*ibid.*, 12). A sense of individual political importance is also developing among what Lotti calls 'the welfare youth': it is shown in the goal to increase one's influence that the majority of Finnish youth seems to have, even though Finns remain globally far less inclined to protest than the French (*ibid.*, 13-14).

Another aspect of interest that surely is closely linked to the functionalist / personalist dichotomy lies in motivation factors: Mattoug (1996) argues that the French, in order to be motivated so as to achieve a given task, usually like to think about the people that are also involved in the achievement of this task. For whom and / or with whom a task is supposed to be achieved matters. For Finns, the main reference for motivation will rather be, typically, the rationale for this task, the reason why it should be achieved. This does not mean that the people involved do not matter at all, but rather that they are not the main motivating factors. Conversely, for the French, the rational explanation for the task is an important factor, but not necessarily the determining one for the pursuit of motivation.

Still about the functionalist / personalist opposition, it is interesting to notice that the boundary between the professional and the private sphere is not as clear-cut in the French context as in the Finnish context (Fougère & Johansson 2000). Even though the typical French organisation cannot be really considered as being of the 'family' kind (as defined by Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1993), it is still closer to it than the typical Finnish organisation, since in Finland, 'the demarcation line between the family and work is deeper than in many countries.' (Nurmi & Üskvärav 1995, 49) In the Finnish context, the distinction is extremely clear and the professional space should by no means impede on the private space. On the other hand, as Pateau (1998, 213) argues, the French 'person-orientation' can be opposed to a 'task-orientation' in terms of the protection of the 'private time' as opposed to the 'professional time'. This can be related

to Hall's (1976, 1983) high / low context notion², in that the French, belonging to a relatively higher-context culture, tend to need more socialisation and informal interactions at work than Finns usually do. For instance, in the French context, the meals are especially important so as to provide some break from hard intensive work and they usually last quite long, at least compared to the typical Finnish 20-minute lunch... Other breaks may also occur during the French working day, with the ultimate effect that the day may end quite late. These aspects will be a little more developed in the section on reliability vs. flexibility.

There is a number of ways in which the person-task opposition is conspicuous when comparing French and Finnish work values and attitudes. Especially, the most valued jobs in Finland are rather technical ones, and, as Nurmi (1989, 15) puts it, 'most executives have a business school background seconded by technical degrees'. This strongly contrasts with the French tendency to value abstract, intellectual jobs, especially planning (Barsoux & Lawrence 1990; Sorge 1993; Morden 1995). Their technical orientation may make it easier for Finns to identify to their – usually technology-intensive – companies, especially Nokia³ (see again Siltala 1997, 280). It has also been frequently noticed that Finns tend to grant more importance to the quality of the product itself than to the relationship with the client: this is likely not to be very well understood by the French for whom *le client est roi* (see e.g. Pateau 1998, 107).

Consensus vs. Dissensus, 'Conformism vs. Distinctionism'

In Finnish political discourse, it has been very common, since the beginning of the 1980's, to talk of 'the Finnish consensus'. As Alapuro (1990, 95) argues, it is undeniable that the current Finnish society is characterised by an exceptional social cohesion. On the other hand, French society is well known for its 'revolutionary tendency' and strong oppositions between different social and political groups: it is more of a 'dissensus society' (see Pateau 1998, 202-207). More generally, pursuit of consistency, which usually is the rule in Finland, does not seem to be such a significant

² 'A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which *most* of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context (LC) communication is just the opposite ; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.' (Hall & Hall 1990, 6)

³ 'Everybody wants to work for Nokia' (see Harakka 1996, 41).

concern in France, where one can observe plenty of apparent contradictions. However, according to Sorge (1993, 74), ‘in the French constellation, opposites stabilize and hold each other in place, rather than merely acting at cross-purposes.’ This is to be related with what one could refer to as the French dialectical approach. For instance, as Sorge (ibid.) puts it in a metaphorical way, ‘*liberté-égalité-fraternité* are not so much clichés as simply one side of a coin which invariably falls with a different side upwards each time.’ As well as the contradiction hierarchy-equality can be, to some extent, denied through the French meritocratic ethos, it is possible to explain how a full bureaucracy can cohabit with a central concern for liberty⁴, and how fraternity can be combined with a strong individualism. This third apparent paradox obviously depends on what is meant by ‘individualism’.

In Hofstede’s (1980) study, both Finland and France are quite clearly on the individualistic side. Their respective scores even suggest that they are relatively similar in that field. This observation is very misleading since, in many respects, Finnish individualism can be seen as extremely different from French individualism. Indeed, the French have their own kind of individualism, which they push to the limit. It is especially conspicuous in the often observed French need for individual ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1979): rather than ‘individualism’, which is nowadays almost always understood in its mainly American meaning, ‘individuality’ is possibly a more relevant term here. One could even invent the concept of ‘distinctionism’, since a genuine difference in taste is usually not as decisive in the process of distinction as the very tendency to distinguish oneself as a fundamental principle. Distinction can be enhanced in all fields where taste is at stake, from arts to daily consumption: ‘personalisation’ is sought for through pursuit of the ‘smallest marginal difference’ (*plus petite différence marginale* or *P.P.D.M.*, as explained by Baudrillard 1970, 123) in consumption patterns. In addition, the French, with their typical *esprit de contradiction* (‘contradiction spirit’) and their need to always have personal opinions about whatever topic, seem to value more the individual than the group, although giving one’s own opinion, in the French context, may well be understood as a proof of commitment to the group.

⁴ This problem is somehow relevant to both France and Finland.

In society, distinction can be used as a way to achieve a kind of cultural – and thus social – superiority, with the aim not only to be ‘distinctive’, but also, ‘distinguished’, by enhancing a person’s ‘cultural capital’, or what Bourdieu (1979) calls the *habitus*. Interestingly, this superiority can be achieved because of the possible assimilation to a cultural or social group: people with similar distinctive tastes tend to form clans, which recalls the typical Latin ‘clan rivalry’ (Amado et al., 37). As Sorge (1993, 72) explains, ‘in an interesting dialectical twist, individualism in France is concerned with excellence in the emulation of general norms of taste, logic and professional practice.’ The concept of ‘honour’, as extensively discussed by d’Iribarne (1989), is highly significant here. It is deeply rooted in French history, especially in the old feudal system. As d’Iribarne (ibid., 58-61 especially) puts it, Montesquieu already explained the logic of the ‘monarchic government’ thanks to the principle of honour, which is ‘the prejudice of each person and each condition [...], depends on one’s own caprice [...], is less what one owes others than what one owes her / himself [...], is not as much what calls us toward our fellow citizens as what distinguishes us from them [...], and is closely linked to the pride that one has of her / his rank (*rang* in French)’. The rationale of honour can obviously conflict with other rationales, especially religious and professional ones. This has been a source of misunderstandings and problems until today, when the rationale of honour still exists and ‘is constituted by [one’s] ability to achieve high professional standards and to do justice to norms of taste, sophistication and logical rigour.’ (Sorge 1993, 72) In that respect, organisational behaviour in France is still influenced by aristocratic features.

On the other hand, ‘distinctionistic’ attitudes are not that common in Finland. As Roos and Rahkonen (1985, 272) argue, ‘taste is by no means as important a strategy of distinction for the new middle class in Finland as it is in France’. Analysing the critiques for the same movies in both Finland and France, Alapuro (1988, 4) demonstrates how the French meta-understanding of them (‘movies about movies’) contrasts with the naive, ‘on the surface’ Finnish reading, only concerned with the storyline itself. Generally put, Finnish culture seems to be more characterised by a certain ‘conformism’: when Finnish people, displaying a somewhat individualistic pattern, go to the countryside to be as far away from urban life as possible, nearly all of them go to ‘a-wooden-cottage-nearby-a-lake-in-the-forest’. In addition, even though

Finns may seem to be less gregarious than the French when they are abroad, their groups are usually bound together in a much stronger way. This has to be related to the 'sense of community' identified by Amado et al. (1990, 37) in the North. Especially, the tendency to have university-specific overalls or other signs demonstrating to what Finnish "Nation" you belong in all big celebrations shows how 'collectivistic' Finns can be in some respects. The Finnish national need for recognition, sometimes referred to as an 'inferiority complex' unites people and causes a much stronger patriotism (see again Branch 1994 and Kirby 1994) than in comparatively bigger and more ethnocentric countries, such as France. Attitudes toward the military service in Finland and in France are, in this respect, quite telling: while most French youth try to avoid having to do it by all means, many Finns are still proud of having experienced it - although often only in retrospect. Other examples of a stronger collectivism in Finland include political or ethnic aspects, according to which French extreme diversity contrasts with Finnish relative consensus and homogeneity. As Tapaninen (1994, 113) shows it, until not so long ago, 'the Finnish version of democracy meant aiming at consensus, not the weighing up of different opinions' and 'the role accorded to criticism and debate of alternatives characteristic of the western concept of democracy was very small, almost non-existent.' Still today, arguably, new political ideas are usually 'sucked into the consensus apparatus' rather than used as an opposition force to the power in place. To explain the impression of Finnish homogeneity that many Finns themselves seem to have, Ehrnrooth (1999, 223) argues that in the 1870's, during the National Awakening period, the discourses from intellectuals - especially Topelius in *Maamme kirja* (1985), a book that virtually all Finns over several generations from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century have read at school - pictured Finns as resembling each other exceptionally, and as having a very strong collective will. Ehrnrooth (1999, 224) further explains that in Finland, there is 'a tight semantic link between the individual and the collectivity' and that, in a psychoanalytic manner, Finnish mentality can be described as 'a model in which a harsh super ego, corresponding to the community, monitors the actions of a fragile ego that lacks independence'.

Sometimes, Finnish acceptance of rules and close following of procedures and contracts may also be interpreted as extreme conformism from the French point of view. The difference that Lotti (1984, 11) underlines as to 'moral tolerance' and the 'yes-or-no'

logic (Koivisto 1998, 146) – as opposed to more of a ‘yes-and-no’ one - certainly influence the relative impressions that French and Finns have of each other. Being able to defend opinions that look contradictory at first sight, while easily considered as not being genuine and honest in Finland, is valued as a ‘national sport’ in France: again, contradiction – or ‘dissensus’⁵ - has to be constructive, and taking the opposite view in a dialogue enriches it, eventually leading to more balanced and subtle opinions. It is not as such a matter of valuing eloquence more than everything, even though there are certainly many ‘sophists’ in France. More generally, contradictory discourses can be linked with a number of French traditions of thought that fundamentally questioned established truths, starting with Descartes and his *doute méthodique* (‘methodical doubt’) through which he found the *cogito ergo sum* theory. Critical theories have always been developed in France, up to this day, when a great deal of French intellectuals contribute to inspiring the ‘postmodern’ movement(s). In French organisations, contradictions and ‘dissensus’-seeking behaviour often turn into *conflits ouverts* (‘open conflicts’), which later lead to the largely informal adjustments (d’Iribarne 1989, 28) that were mentioned above. The Finnish pursuit of consensus and compromise (Heiskanen 1986), which allegedly lies in Finnish language itself (Koivisto 1998, 143)⁶, is much more peaceful. The stronger French inclination to protest (Lotti 1984, 14) contributes to explaining these phenomena. Indeed, if Finland is ‘a highly unionized country’, unions have always been fairly pragmatic and satisfied with the ‘centralized collective bargaining system linked to a “consensus” with the Government’ (Nurmi & Üskvärav 1995, 70). In France, ‘fragmentation [of the unions] has made workplace and industry-wide bargaining difficult.’ (Sorge 1993, 84) Moreover, the most important unions indulge into conflicts rather than negotiations so as to solve problems, overusing the good old *lutte des classes* (‘class struggle’) rhetoric. As a result, ‘union membership [...] amounts to only about 10 per cent of the working population’ (ibid.), and actions often suffer from disorganisation and lack of ‘collectivism’.

⁵ Mattoug (1996) explains that the French ‘discourse teleology’, that is, the final aim that is pursued in an oral intervention, consists in ‘dissensus’: having an own, innovative and original opinion matters a great deal.

⁶ As Koivisto (ibid.) argues, this is one of the Finnish characteristics of higher contextuality.

Reliability vs. Flexibility, Segmentation vs. Transversality

In organisations, there is often a trade-off between reliability and flexibility, in that both cannot be optimised at the same time: too much reliability may be detrimental to flexibility, and conversely, too much flexibility may be detrimental to reliability. Both reliability and flexibility are valued everywhere to some extent, but their relative importance varies: it is a matter of priority that is given to one over the other, in situations where both values enter in competition. In the Finnish context, the relative importance of reliability will be more salient, while, in the French context, flexibility will often be prioritised. This trade-off between reliability and flexibility is conspicuous in many different patterns: regarding the attitude to rules, the planning and organisation of time, the sense of integration, and the concept of decision.

In general, the ‘relative salience of rules’, which defines, according to Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993), a ‘universalistic’ culture, is much more striking in Finland than in France. This does not only correspond to a certain ‘non-obedient’ behaviour on the part of the French, but also to the very way in which the rules are set in France. While Finnish rules tend to be rather ‘pragmatic’, involving a ‘responsible compliance’, Usunier (2000, 84) shows that French rules tend to be set as ‘challengeable rules’ because ‘ordinary people view themselves as having a better human nature than those at the top’, and that consequently they indulge in an ‘exploring behaviour’, meaning that they ‘look for the margins of interpretation’. Indeed, while there are arguably more rules in France, all of them seem to need to have exceptions⁷, without which they would not really be rules. In many respects, exceptions are the rule in organisations too. D’Iribarne (1989, 58) argues that this system of exceptions, of ‘arrangements’, ‘informal adjustments’, works thanks to the dialectical rationale of honour, which can be balanced thanks to ‘moderation’. Indeed, the different groups that aim to favour their interests do not only act according to their specific prerogatives, but also, at least as importantly, according to duties. These duties and the privileges together constitute the identity of each group. Among the duties that are common to all groups in the French system, there is one of ‘moderation’, which ‘allows people to work together, even if they are far from

⁷ From the French expression: *l’exception qui confirme la règle* (‘the exception that confirms the rule’), which shows once again how apparently contradicting features actually define each other in French dialectics.

getting on.’ (ibid., 31) This moderation allows for compromises and arrangements: rules and procedures are usually not as strictly followed as they should be in theory⁸, but things work fairly enough. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993, 338-339) mention the importance, in France, of *Système D*, which refers to the verb *se débrouiller* (‘to unravel or disentangle’), and which is ‘the art of bending the rules without breaking them.’ This obviously contrasts strongly with the Finnish attitude to rules, which is, comparatively, totally inflexible. Finns are indeed considered as more law-abiding than most other European peoples, which is demonstrated at all levels of society: as to bribery, especially, ‘the record of the country has always been very innocent compared to many other countries.’ (Nurmi 1989, 11)

An important consequence of the rationale of honour and moderation is that fully contractual approaches are inadequate in France. First, they cannot be combined with the personal sense of prerogatives and duties that each person has. Second, in the personalist system, senior executives, to act with dignity, have to defend their subordinates from higher management, and thus cannot use the impersonal official sanctions that this higher management provides them with (d’Iribarne 1989, 96). On the other hand, the Finnish system is relatively more based on the functionalist American model, which systematically deals with objectives and duties in a contractual way (see again d’Iribarne 1989, 129-202).

As written above, generally speaking, Finns seem to be more concerned with reliability than with flexibility: French so-called ‘flexibility’, at least, often conflicts with a view in which reliability is a prerequisite, especially as far as time is concerned. Indeed, as Nurmi (1989, 12) puts it, ‘Finns are time-conscious, hence, punctuality and the keeping of deadlines are important’, while they are just not a priority to the French, because time inflexibility can easily be considered as an attack on individual liberty. The opposition between monochronism and polychronism is useful to understand the Finnish-French antagonism⁹ as to the planning and organisation of time. Monochronism, which characterises Finnish work culture, means ‘paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time’, while polychronic time, which corresponds more to French work culture, ‘means being involved with many things at once’ (Hall & Hall 1990, 13). Mattoug

⁸ Would they be, the need for individual liberty would not be satisfied, in the French logic.

⁹ Karppinen-Takada (1994, p. 7) underlines the opposition between Finnish monochronism and South European polychronism.

(1996) describes these time orientations as ‘consecutive time management’ and ‘simultaneous time management’ respectively. In monochronic cultures, time is experienced in a linear way: it can be, for instance, ‘spent’, ‘saved’ or ‘wasted’. Usunier (2000, 29) explains that ‘not only the start of a meeting but also its finish will be planned’. In polychronic cultures, on the other hand, time is seldom experienced as ‘wasted’. In the French context, which is monochronic enough to have schedules yet, in practice, rather polychronic, it is possible to ‘go on talking or working after preset hours and break [one’s] schedule’ (ibid.). The French need a great deal of flexibility in planning and scheduling. For instance, French meetings usually last longer than Finnish meetings: they are an opportunity for each employee to seek ‘dissensus’ and express her/his creative opinions... or sometimes merely to display her/his ‘oratory skill’ (Morden 1995, p. 33), which unfortunately is often equally important, as we will see in the section on communication. Unlike Finnish professional meetings, French professional meetings thus have some social value, insofar as they sometimes favour long debates, provided that ideas are well argued for. French polychronism thus allows for some needed socialisation to take place in the company, even though French socialisation habits may often look rather superficial to a Finn. For monochronic people, with a sort of ‘Time is money’ approach¹⁰, it is always more important and respectful to take as little time as possible from others, but for polychronic people, knowing how to give a significant part of one’s time is the most valuable sign of respect¹¹. This is somehow related to the difference in the concept of ‘quality of life’.

A concept like ‘quality of life’ varies very much according to the kind of culture one belongs to. Especially, the French definition of that concept may involve more social contacts and the Finnish one more need for privacy, i.e. two completely opposite things. For instance, French employees often need to have several small breaks during the day, in addition to a long lunch break, the right for a good lunch being a very important aspect of the French ‘quality of life’. As a result – and also because of French polychronic features –, the French working day usually lasts very long and ends very late, at least in comparison to an equivalent level Finnish working day. In effect, with an equal amount of work, the latter tends to be shorter, but much more intensive, with very

¹⁰ This approach has been found to correlate positively with monochronism (Usunier 1991, 207).

few breaks¹² and very little time for lunch, at least in comparison to French values. Generally speaking, it may be more important for Finnish 'quality of life' to be back at home not too late so as to be able to spend some time with the family. This is obviously a matter of 'Work/Family dilemma', as Karppinen-Takada (1993, 7) puts it. In Finland, 'a normal work schedule [for women] is from Monday to Friday 8.00-16.00 with half an hour's lunch in between' (ibid., 10), which would not be imaginable in France, where many people, including women, finish work after seven in the evening. Therefore, it seems that the French need for 'quality of life' is translated at the workplace by the will to have more flexible, informal contacts, which make the working day longer, whereas the Finnish need for 'quality of life' is translated into the will to go home as early as possible so as to enjoy some private or family life.

The 'segmentation vs. transversality' antagonism (Pateau 1998, 156) is closely related to the trade-off between reliability and flexibility. In addition to the monochronism / polychronism opposition, it includes some other ideas. In Finnish culture, characterised by 'segmentation', each task will be rigorously dealt with, with a stress on the details, and managers will tend to be specialists. On the other hand, in the 'transversal' French culture, tasks will be more easily integrated into systems, the vision will be more global and holistic, and managers will rather be 'generalists'. This antagonism can also be expressed in Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1993) terms of 'Analysed specifics vs. Integrated wholes'. This surely fits with the conflict between a 'functionalist' and a 'personalist' view of the organisation.

A final relevant field in which one can describe a trade-off between reliability and flexibility relates to the concept of decision. Although it may not always be obvious, this concept tends to vary across cultures, and happens to be significantly different in the Finnish and the French models. D'Iribarne (1998, 103-105) shows how the French attitude to decisions tends to be extremely flexible when compared to attitudes in a Nordic context. He explains (ibid., 103) that a French decision is just one 'moment of a never-ending process of confrontation of viewpoints on what is a reasonable solution', and that as such, it is not seen as deserving a lot of respect. In the French context, a

¹¹ An excellent example to epitomise this conflict between 'giving' and 'not taking' time can be found in Bouchet (1996, 67-68) on interactions between Danes (offering sandwiches in the meeting room) and Spaniards (offering three-hour dinners in the town's best restaurant after work).

¹² Coffee breaks, which are common in many organisations, tend to disappear if there is too much to do: people then have their coffee in their 'private' offices, without a social dimension.

decision can be changed if a better solution is later found, based, for instance, on a more ‘transversal’ view from the holistic leader. In the Finnish context, on behalf of reliability, this is not acceptable, and a decision is by definition irrevocable.

Communication: Explicitness vs. Implicitness, Humility vs. Eloquence

Regarding communication, two main cultural antagonisms seem to be apparent. They relate to two of the patterns that Koivisto (1998, 133-146) underlines as being observable in Finland and somehow related to Lutheranism. On both of these patterns, ‘Catholic cultures’, and especially French culture, can be seen as clearly differing from Finnish culture. First, explicitness in communication, while a requirement in Finland, is to be avoided in relatively higher context¹³ France (Hall 1976 and 1983, and Hall & Hall 1990). Second, modesty and simplicity are not valued to the same extent in both countries: in France, the need for strong eloquence usually cannot be combined with too much show of humility.

As Hall & Hall (1990, 7) state it, ‘low-context people tend to compartmentalize their personal relationships, their work, and many aspects of day-to-day life’ and therefore, ‘each time they interact with others they need detailed background information’. This is somewhat relevant to Finns, although they may not, as a rule, need as much detailed background information as Germans, for instance, usually do. In Finland, it is not as much the quantity of the conveyed information as the explicitness of the message that will be striking to a person from a generally higher context culture. This explicitness may be badly experienced by a French person: ‘high-context people are apt to become impatient and irritated when low-context people insist on giving them information they don’t need’ and ‘too much information leads [French] people to feel they are being talked down to’ (ibid., 9). As Pateau (1998, 97) explains, even low-context individuals – such as the Germans in that case - tend to grant more ‘human’ virtues to the more implicit French communication mode than to the abrupt, direct, potentially shocking fashion in which they themselves often communicate, yet they perceive such an explicit communication as more efficient in a professional context where time pressure is strong. Therefore, Finns interacting with French people in work situations may perceive

¹³ For a definition of the high / low context theory, see footnote 2.

a lack of efficiency if they feel that they are not provided with enough information. 'Too little information can mystify [low-context people] or make them feel left out' (Hall & Hall 1990, 9).

Finnish 'explicitness and low contextuality of communication' (Koivisto 1998, 146) also contrast strongly with what one could call French 'vagueness': d'Iribarne (1989, 105) explains that it is often hard to collect factual data in some French organisations. As well, he argues that French companies have a special expertise in managing 'what is too vague to be conveniently included in clearly expressed objectives, rules and contracts.' (ibid., 96) Indeed, management by objectives has not been working well in France, and in general a systematically contractual approach is not well adapted to the French system.

Very linked to the idea of French implicitness in communication is the typically French notion of *second degré* ('second degree'). Alapuro (1997) shows how this notion (which he calls in Finnish '*toinen aste*') matters a great deal in French culture... but is virtually impossible to translate to non-French people, and especially strongly contrasts with Finnish culture. At the core of this notion is the idea that communication is a sort of game that people play, a sort of performance in which problems are not addressed explicitly but understood in a tacit way by the participants. This sort of game is common in many contexts in French culture, including in organisations; it is obviously quite hard to understand its rules for outsiders, especially in contexts where people are expected to be 'serious', such as in Finnish organisations...

Nurmi (1989, 12) explains that 'when a Finn attempts to give a foreigner solid information, he may be seen and heard as dead serious, censored or even blunt not only on the basis of what the Finn says but also as much on the basis of what he does not say.' (Nurmi 1989, 12). This can be quite badly perceived by a Frenchman, because eloquence is especially important to French people, who often need to convince others, especially in meetings, which 'provide the *cadre* with a stage on which to display [their] oratory skill[s].' (Barsoux & Lawrence 1990, 79) Finnish meetings, on the other hand, are usually places where people are informed of decisions: the latter are neither to be made nor to be 'sold' there (see Laine-Sveiby 1991, 92-99).

Individual eloquence matters tremendously in the French context. Its importance may be related to the pursuit of 'distinction' discussed above. For instance, in his study of a

famous merger attempt between a French and a Swedish car company, d'Iribarne (1998, p. 97-101) contrasts the Swedish need for affirmation of a common identity with the French pursuit of *joute oratoire* ('oratory joust'), where the main objective is to impose one's ideas through logical argumentation. On the other hand, in the Nordic context, strongly influenced by Lutheran values, the need for humility and simplicity (see e.g. Koivisto 1998, 146) seems to be antagonistic with a too important stress on eloquence.

Summing-up Table

Finnish Culture	French Culture
Functionalist vision of the organisation Hierarchy of problems to be solved Authority legitimised by achievement Strong egalitarianism Relationship between tasks and causes Strict professional/private boundary Technical jobs highly valued Focus on product quality	Personalist vision of the organisation Hierarchy of persons to be managed Authority legitimised by ascription Strong élitism Relationship between tasks and persons Unclear professional/private boundary Abstract, intellectual jobs highly valued Focus on relationship with client
Consensus-seeking Political and social consensus Consistency valued Discursive stress on agreement Homogeneity feeling Relative conformism	Dissensus-seeking Systematic political and social conflict Integration of opposites in the system Discursive stress on contradiction Heterogeneity, diversity Pursuit of distinction
Reliability as a must Responsible compliance to pragmatic rules Monochronic time orientation Intensive, relatively short working day Not wasting the other's time valued Rigorous stress on analysed specifics Managers as specialists Decisions perceived as irrevocable	Flexibility as a must Flexibility toward challengeable rules Polychronic time orientation Long working day, with social breaks Sharing one's time valued Holistic stress on integrated wholes Managers as generalists Possibility to change decisions
Explicit communication Low context orientation Need for precise information Seriousness in work communication Humility especially valued	Implicit communication Relatively higher context orientation Exploitation of vagueness <i>Second degré</i> , communication games Eloquence especially valued

Table 1: Summing-up Finnish-French cultural antagonisms in organising

Conclusions and Implications

Finnish and French ‘organising cultures’ seem to be different, if not ‘antagonistic’, in many respects. A number of striking oppositions can be noticed between them, forming two altogether different ‘cultural systems’. Indeed, the four fundamental antagonisms underlined in this paper are found to be closely interrelated and integrated, serving as explanation, justification and legitimisation for each other. It is important that people may be aware of these differences, as this awareness certainly can help to solve some of the problems caused by intercultural misunderstandings. Explaining the differences is only, however, a first step in the process of improving bicultural interactions.

One of the next steps could be to try to capitalise on similarities: a positive focus on harmony rather than a negative emphasis on difference. It is not that easy though, insofar as similarities are not always recognised – and actually most often not noticed – by the people who are supposed to be similar to each other. Another step toward good exploitation of intercultural work could be to use the knowledge on the differences as a basis for setting up a system in which the two cultures would be complementary. Again, that would be looking positively at the problem, seeking to take advantage of the cross-cultural and self-cultural awareness gained in the bicultural interaction and create intercultural synergy – instead of harmony – this time. The most positive approach would be to try to integrate harmony and synergy in a more complete model. Unfortunately, there are not too many such attempts to be talked of yet, and the latest trend is rather toward more and more denying of cultural differences – at least within the Western world.

In order to try and get to understand the dynamics of such abstract notions as ‘bicultural harmony’ or ‘bicultural synergy’, a basic need is to go further than a cross-cultural comparison and try to analyse the bicultural interaction itself. Therefore, a corresponding Finnish-French empirical research, looking at interactions in a few case organisations, should be of interest.

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