

# Business Communication of a Persuasive Nature

## Style Adaptation and Effectiveness during Intercultural Interactions

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### Abstract

Researchers have demonstrated that there are preferred cultural persuasive styles but little empirical research has examined the strategies for adapting persuasive styles in intercultural business interactions. This qualitative study investigates preferred persuasive styles, perceptions of alternative persuasive styles and adaptation strategies among Estonian local municipal managers. This article creates a new path for an explanatory study using a stratified sample by integrating differences in persuasive styles and effective communication theories. The findings introduce how alternative persuasive styles are perceived and how managers adapt to them. The paper offers solutions for adaptation strategies leading to more effective intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** *business discourse, intercultural business communication, persuasive communication of managers, intercultural communication of Estonian managers, intercultural communication with high context cultures, effectiveness of communication, persuasive style, anxiety/ uncertainty management*

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### Introduction

Communication that aims to convince the other party to support an idea, to agree with certain conditions or to perform certain actions (Simons 1976) is an essential part of business, which nowadays is often conducted in an intercultural environment. While differences in persuasive styles from a cross-cultural perspective have been conceptualised (Glenn et al. 1977; Johnstone 1989, 2008), little attention has been paid by scholars to strategies for adapting persuasive styles in intercultural interactions. As making adaptations and correcting errors are among the primary means to increase the effectiveness of communication (Gudykunst 2005), the current study examines preferred persuasive styles among managers, their perception of alternative styles and their adaptation strategies.

There are altogether 194 local municipalities and 33 towns and cities in Estonia (13 towns are included as local municipalities, and 20 have local governing bodies.) After Estonia joined the EU in 2004, direct intercultural contacts between local municipal representatives and foreign partners within and outside the EU have increased dramatically, and managers are well positioned to describe their intercultural interactions. The majority of this contact is part of a relatively new experience for both parties involved. This paper advances our understanding of the preferred persuasive style concept and its connection with the effectiveness of communication in a global context. This qualitative in-depth study answers the call by Joseph Cheng (2007:26–27) “to investigate the phenomena that are difficult to quantify” and “to incorporate local country knowledge into the development of theories about management”. He stated (Cheng 2007:26), that “increased reliance on quantitative data analysis using large samples, as is characteristic of much of the management research published in the academic journals, has the negative effect of leading scholars to investigate phenomena that can readily be investigated with quantitative indicators (e.g., firm or industry characteristics), at the expense of those that are hard to measure such as societal culture and its influence on behaviour.” As increases in the accuracy of predictions and

explanations regarding the behaviour of foreign partners help to increase the effectiveness of communication (Gudykunst 2005), the aim of the study is to propose solutions for the reduction of anxiety and uncertainty in persuasive intercultural business communication as part of the development of Gudykunst's effective communication doctrine.

## The process and effectiveness of persuasive communication

This section of the paper is set out in three related parts that are central to understanding intercultural persuasive communication. First, it discusses the process and key elements of communication, traditionally described using graphic images or "communication models," where a derivative transactional model is applicable to persuasive communication. Generic styles and cross-cultural differences in persuasion are introduced in the second part. These differences are rooted in the inner characteristics of the source and receiver, and are expressed mainly in message structure, content and code. The third part presents Gudykunst's theory of effective communication, which has proved that misunderstandings can be reduced via accurate interpretations. Applied to persuasive communication, this means that managers should develop a mindfulness in respect to alternative persuasive styles.

### Process and components of communication

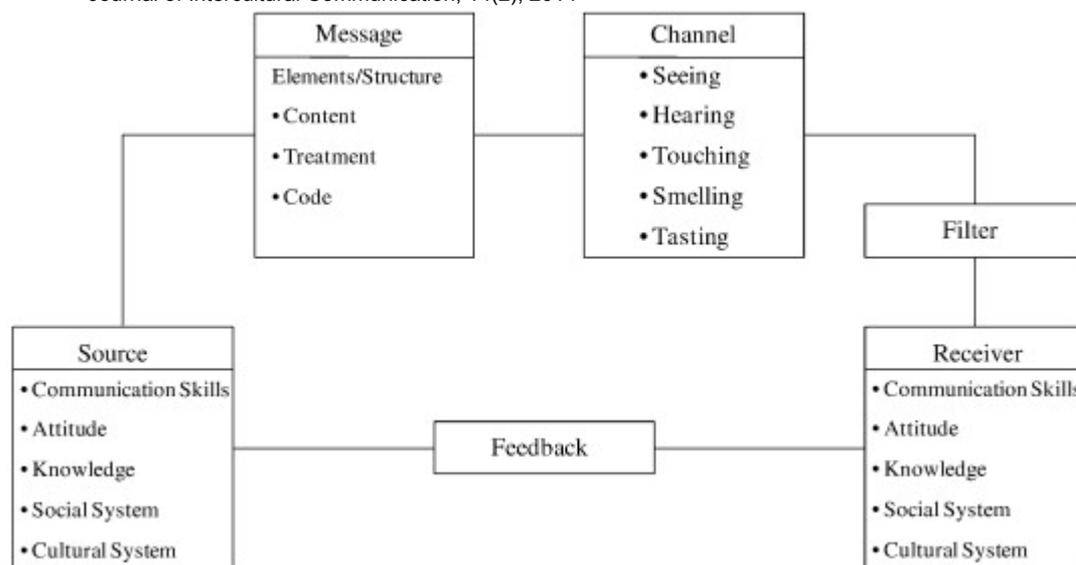
Communication is traditionally described by scholars as a dynamic interpretive process (Berlo 1960; Craig 1999; Miller 2005), where key elements are involved in shaping experiences which can obtain various meanings at different stages of the process. Since Aristotle, who defined the main purpose of communication as "persuasion, an attempt to sway other men to the speaker's point of view" (quoted in Berlo 1960:8), graphic images have been used to describe the process of communication and the interdependence of its components. The main purpose of those images, commonly referred to as "models", has been to improve the communication process in order to raise its effectiveness.

According to Mortensen (1972; 2008), communication models can be oversimplified, confusing the patterns of the real communication they represent and making them overly abstract for the sake of the final model. They "stop or freeze an essentially dynamic interactive or trans-active process into a static picture" (Mortensen 1972:42).

Communication models provide simplistic images of physical reality, and the components they are constructed from are subjectively selected by their authors. However, the classical message-centred "model of communication ingredients" by Berlo (1960:23–24), instead of stressing the interdependence of the elements of the process, focuses on the internal characteristics of recognised key components of communication. It offers guidelines for deeper research into the inner factors of the source, message, channel and receiver, including cultural factors, and their influences on the whole process of communication from an intercultural perspective.

It also provides the starting point for model development; for example, Barnlund's (2008) transactional model of communication, where participants in interpersonal communication are involved in the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages. A derivative model developed by Lee et al. (2012), with the receiver as the target of the whole process of communication is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** *Berlo's "model of communication ingredients" added with the source and receiver providing a feedback to each other.*



Source: Lee et al (2012).

A derivative transactional model is applicable to intercultural persuasive communication where the main message flow is directed toward the receiver, whose feedback is crucial to the success of the communication. Inter-individual feedback includes linguistic mechanisms Allwood et al. (1993:3-4) which enable the participants of a conversation to exchange information about contact, perception, understanding and attitudinal reactions. According to Allwood et al. (1993:26) feedback mechanisms are highly context dependent.

Findings by Gudykunst (2003a) prove that the importance of the feedback is different for low-context communication (verbally explicit, direct, with the main meaning in the message attached to the words) and high-context communication (where previous knowledge, experiences, environmental, hierarchical, relational settings and other components of the context are used to construct the message).

In low-context communication, the participants can be satisfied with one-way communication; they consider the feedback less important for ascertaining shared meaning, as the words and sentences they use contain only one meaning. In their mind the receiver is responsible for the success of the communication (Gudykunst 2003a:55–56).

In high-context communication, feedback is most important for creating and determining shared meaning as participants must coordinate their meaning from the context. Verbal messages can contain multiple meanings, both sender and receiver may intend or receive multiple meanings, and “communication success is negotiated between communicators” (Gudykunst 2003a:56–57).

## Cross-cultural differences in persuasion

Pursuing the traditional Aristotelian understanding of the main goal of communication (Garver 1995), persuasion research during the last 60 years has developed as follows. Initiated by the seminal analysis of Hovland et al. (1953) it at first focused on the intra-cultural American mainstream environment analysed by communication scholars mainly from the political perspective (Appelbaum and Anatol 1974; Berlo et al. 1969; Simons 1976). With the further development of international co-operation, later research showed that “in case of some other national cultures persuasion based on the presentation of facts, loses its efficiency in favour of different strategies” (Glenn et al. 1977:52). Each cultural environment implements persuasion as a combination of three basic styles: the factual-inductive (grounded on facts and figures), the axiomatic-deductive (grounded on ideas, principles and beliefs), and the effective-intuitive (grounded on feelings and emotions). The weight of these three basic styles alters in different cultural environments, but the empirical study conducted by Glenn et al. (1977) has shown that the factual-inductive is dominant in the US, the axiomatic-deductive in what was then the Soviet Union and the effective-intuitive in Arab countries.

The study examined American, Soviet and Arab styles of persuasion in the course of debates in the Security Council of The United Nations. The findings were widely used by scholars over the next three decades (e.g. Adler and Gundersen 2008:224–226), except by the authors of the research themselves (Glenn et al. 1977:65-66) having considered their work preliminary and including serious limitations – having been conducted during the Cold War on the basis of a single dispute it was potentially biased. However, they developed an alternative methodology to study persuasion styles, which will be explained below, and which is used for the current examination.

With the further evolution of intercultural communication as an interdisciplinary field, studies of cultural differences in persuasive effects became an integrative part of management and marketing research, partly in connection with negotiation tactics (Aaker and Maheswaran 1997; Chang and Chou, 2008; Simintiras and Thomas 1998). The studies revealed that cultural background affects how goals, plans and objectives are communicated and perceived by the parties involved.

From Johnstone's investigation (1989), it was asserted that a certain preferred persuasive style exists at any one cultural level. There are individual, group or regional variations intra-culturally (Johnstone 2010), but she proved that there is a distinct trend or persuasive pattern which most members of a given culture prefer in the majority of occasions. This pattern originates in the inner characteristics (Barnlund 2008; Berlo 1960) of the source and receiver. The main differences are expressed in terms of message structure, content and code. Table 1 introduces the generic styles of persuasion that can be defined as preferred in different cultures.

**Table 1:** *Characteristics of Cultural Persuasive Styles*

	<b>Quasi-logical</b>	<b>Presentational</b>	<b>Analogical</b>
<b>Creation of Evidence</b>	Facts (based on testimony), figures,  Statistics	Convinced way to present ideas, believes, emotional aspects	Metaphors, analogies
<b>Warrant as connection</b>	Formal logic (bits of right information should lead to conclusion).	Creation of emotional involvement, respond, participation.	Collective experience (of groups or cultures) should convince.
<b>Presentation of ideas</b>	Formal, rigid structure is very important.	Choice of words to win audience is important.	Choice of right examples to illustrate position is important.
<b>Conclusion as persuasive claim</b>	From general to specific, explicit, outspoken, "one right way".	Intense words brighten persuasive idea.  Right or wrong isn't fixed. One unquestionable truth doesn't exist.	As lesson from offered examples (implicit or explicit). Truth is based on previous experiences.
<b>Main accent and substantial ability from source respectively</b>	Stress on information: to collect, select and organise information in structural form.	Stress on speakers' personality: charisma, attractiveness, and presentation skills.	Stress on context: knowledge of audience background, ability to connect it with message topic.

Source: drafted by the author as a generalisation of Johnstone's (1989, 2008) theory.

## Effective communication and Gudykunst's AUM theory

Since Hall (1959) introduced the term "intercultural communication," the field has expanded dramatically with the globalisation of business and public sector activities. While one of the key concepts, intercultural communication competence (ICC), still causes debate among scholars (Arasaratnam 2007; Messner and Schäfer 2012; Spitzberg 2007; Wiseman 2003), it is agreed that effectiveness of communication is a crucial feature of ICC. The theoretical basis of intercultural communication effectiveness on the interpersonal and intergroup level, which previously was mainly the area of disconnected practitioners, was developed by William Gudykunst (1993; 1995), who examined effective communication in terms of minimizing misunderstandings (Gudykunst 2003a:26). His anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory of effective communication (Gudykunst 2005) is normally referred to as AUM theory. Its first 34 axioms are grouped into sections around the issues of self-esteem, motivation, attitudes toward strangers, in-group and out-group categorizing, situational settings, connections between people, dignity and respect in interactions with strangers (Gudykunst 2005:294–304). These issues are related to anxiety and uncertainty management.

Axioms 35-39 (Gudykunst 2005:305–307) concentrate on mindfulness as the skill involved in creating learning abilities concerned with out-group members and being open to new experiences and perspectives. According to Gudykunst (2005:305) it is a key factor of effective communication and the culmination of the theory. He stresses that in-group members should be mindful of the communication process rather than of the communication outcome. Applied to persuasive communication, this means that managers should be mindful of their own and alternative persuasive styles. They should pay attention to the structure, content and code of the messages rather than to the feedback. A summary of this section is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** *Essential factors of effective communication according to Gudykunst*

<b>Essential source abilities to be increased</b>	<b>Influence on communication process</b>	<b>Boundary conditions for source</b>
Ability to describe strangers' behaviour	Increase in ability to predict their behaviour accurately	1. Mindful of process of communication
Mindfulness of communication process with strangers	Increase in ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty	2. Not overly vigilant
Mindfully recognising and correcting pragmatic errors in conversations with strangers	Facilitates negotiating with strangers which will produce increase in effectiveness of communication	3. Anxiety and uncertainty are between minimum and maximum thresholds.
Ability to manage anxiety about interacting with strangers and increase in accuracy of predictions and explanations regarding their behaviour	Increase in effectiveness of our communication	When at minimum, people lose interest in communication process and become indifferent about its outcome. When at maximum, people get too frustrated emotionally, can leave the scene or engage in open conflict

Source: adapted by the author from Gudykunst (2005:306–307).

Effectiveness for Gudykunst (Gudykunst and Nishida 2001; 2005) is based on the accuracy of the interpretation of the message by the receiver – the closer it is to the meaning that was intended by the source, the more effective the communication between those two. Yoshitake (2002:183) commented that "to view effective communication as attribution of the closest meaning to the intended meaning reduces communication to a linear and mechanical activity where messages are transferred from sender to receiver". He also (Yoshitake 2002:185) found "ethnocentric judgments of different cultures in the content of the axioms, when individualism and low uncertainty avoidance cultures are viewed positively, and collectivism and high uncertainty avoidance cultures are viewed negatively" (quoted in Gudykunst 2003 b:34). In response to this critique, the last 7 axioms (Gudykunst 2005: 308-311) out of a total 47 state the cross-cultural variability in AUM processes and bring up the major differences between the attitudes of collectivist and individualistic cultures.

## Generation of propositions

A research proposition serves as a connection between concepts; it has to be proved or disproved using previous studies, justified argument and existing data (Whetten 1989). *Cooper and Schindler (2008:64)* state that *propositions* are statements about concepts or *Cooper and Schindler (2008: 64)* state that *propositions* are statements about concepts or observable phenomena, that may be judged as true or false. Hypotheses state the relationship between variables and are generated for empirical testing that can be repeated (Bernard 2012: 579). "The primary difference between propositions and hypotheses is that propositions involve concepts whereas hypotheses require measures" (Whetten 1989:491). Applying the previous discussion to the Estonian business environment I have formulated three propositions, based on the following.

The research conducted in 33 nations (Gelfand et al. 2011) shows that Estonians have relatively strong prevention self-guides, high regulatory strength and a need for structure as micro-level psychological affordability. So, when an Estonian manager is acting as a source, much attention in the communication process is given to the message structure and treatment. As the recent study proved (Pruvli and Alas, 2012), communication by Estonian managers in a business setting is low-context, ranked by managers themselves as having 1 point (on a scale of 1–7) less context than Swiss and German, and 3 points less than US business communication. This confirms earlier findings (McCrae et al. 2007:955) that among 49 national cultures, the Estonian national stereotype, which has links to personality traits, values and beliefs, is closest to the German and Swiss national stereotypes. The classical investigation of basic persuasive styles by Glenn et al. (1977) showed that in the US the main style is factual-inductive (grounded on facts and figures that are presented in a structured way). Later findings by Johnstone (1989), who used the term "quasi-logical cultural persuasive style", introduced the peculiar characteristics of the American persuasive style, which are affined and strongly affiliated with low-context communication (Johnstone 1989, 2008). This provides the basis for the first proposition:

***P1. Performing as a source in persuasive business communication, the Estonian manager mainly uses a quasi-logical style with some elements of presentational and analogical styles.***

When participants are involved into transactional persuasive communication (Barnlund, 2008), they send and receive messages simultaneously. A participant who initiated the process as a source, when getting messages will perform as a receiver. According to Gudykunst (2005), the ability to describe the behaviour of strangers increases the ability to predict their behaviour accurately, which is important for effective communication. Anxiety and uncertainty should be between minimum and maximum thresholds (Gudykunst 2005:306). A study by Gelfand et al. (2011) revealed that among 33 researched nations, Estonians have a high level of tolerance of deviant behaviour. Recent studies of the Big Five personality traits included an Estonian sample. It was argued, that in 29 researched cultures, people see themselves as more open to experience, seeking more positive emotions but much less assertive compared to how they are seen by strangers (Allik et al. 2010:870-881). Examination in 22 samples from 20 countries (Möttus et al. 2012:1424-1425) revealed clear cross-sample differences in response styles. According to the Lewis triangle model (2005) of cultural communicative types, Estonian culture is nearly in the middle between

the reactive and linear-active types, so having the greatest differences in the multi-active cultural types. The last contain a number of characteristics (Lewis 2005:29-32), which are conterminous or contiguous with the features of presentational and analogical persuasion styles (Johnstone 1989). Therefore the following proposition is made:

***P2. The Estonian manager in a receiver position evaluates presentational and analogical persuasion styles as containing inappropriate emotions and irrelevant information.***

Lewis (2005) showed that there is a trend towards insisting on one's traditional cultural approaches when under stress, which accompanies discrepancies in business communication. During some intercultural persuasive interactions, a style based on statistical evidence and facts presented in a structured way "loses its efficiency in favour of different strategies" (Glenn et al. 1977). Gudykunst (2005) demonstrates in his AUM theory that an increase in ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty, mindfully adjusting communicative slips in intercultural communication, will increase the effectiveness of the communication. Therefore, the following proposition is put forward:

***P3. To raise the effectiveness of business communication, Estonians will increase the quasi-logical orientation of the persuasion style, reducing the presentational and analogical elements to a minimum.***

## Empirical study

This study uses the applied qualitative research with a focus on the intercultural communication process aiming to find out how to make it more effective. To achieve this aim, the following research questions should be answered:

- What is the preferred persuasion style of Estonian public sector managers?
- How do these managers evaluate alternative persuasion styles during their intercultural business interactions?
- Do Estonian public sector managers adapt their persuasive style in order to increase the effectiveness of intercultural communication, and if they do, what are the main adaptation strategies?

To understand the process, cultural data are used in social science (Bernard 2012:127-128), and obtained from the people "who can offer expert explanations of the cultural norm". A relevant sampling technique is described below.

## Sample

The target sample for this investigation was Estonian managers who work in various local organisations, but have regular intercultural interactions in the fields of social services, education, pedagogy, health care and service management. According to The Statistical Yearbook of Estonia (2012:158-165), the highest percentage of women employees can be found in healthcare and social services (87 %), while in education and the service sector (mainly in hospitality and catering business) over 80% are women. Gender segregation by fields of study is very clear in vocational education. More girls than boys study business and administration, arts, social services, personal services and health-related subjects.

The research sample was constructed in strata and included 18 managers from local municipal governments, representing 10 local municipalities from 10 different counties out of a total of 15 in Estonia. The two largest counties (Harju containing the capital Tallinn, and Tartu), where the majority of the target sample is concentrated, were represented by 22% and 17% of the managers respectively. According to Arbnor and Bjerke (2009:190) "for sampling done this way it can be statistically proven, that one can achieve better representation with the same sample size as for other techniques." Moreover, these people hold their current professional position because they represent the local culture and were

chosen for the study as “specialised informants”. It has been noted (Bernard 2012:171–173), that “specialised informants have a particular competence in some cultural domains” and are “selected for their competence rather than for their representativeness”. Glenn et al. (1977:52–66) analysed the persuasion style of representatives in the UN Security Council from the US, USSR and Arab countries to make conclusions about those numerous and diverse cultures. According to Bernard (2012:175–176), there is growing evidence that 10–20 knowledgeable informants are needed to understand the contents of any well-defined cultural domain, and this sampling technique is widely used in ethnographic investigations (Handwerker 2001; Wolcott 2008; Zaman 2008).

In the sample here, 17% of the managers are men, 83% are women, and by nature of their work responsibilities, 100% have intercultural interactions in connection with educational, pedagogical, social, service sector development and health care projects. The age of the participants was 28–47, with an age average of 35. All the participants have higher education primarily in the humanities and social sciences, were born and lived most of their lives in Estonia and speak Estonian as their native language. Prior to the experiences reported during the research, 33% had attended courses related to the theory of intercultural communication.

## Research design and data collection

According to Craig and Muller (2007), the source possesses control over the process of communication, so the scope of the communication study can be outlined in accordance with the roles of the participants. Therefore, the study shall rely on the source self-reporting in respect to the control (strategies implemented by the source) and content (message) of the communication, as well as on feedback given to the source. According to Glenn et al. (1977), the customary approach to examining persuasive strategies is to evaluate the change in the receiver’s attitude. Due to implementation difficulties, an alternative methodology was proposed by Glenn et al. (1977:53). Their method examines the communication process from the perspective of the source. It is based on the following assumption: the participants who hold a special representative position in their own society choose the persuasion style that conforms to their own previous experiences within their own culture and possesses matching communication patterns including their perception of communication feedback. It particularly takes place during argument (Craig 2011) and persuasion. To address the empirical questions posed, the author used this method to obtain emic explanations about the communication process, when “specialised informants” were acting as cultural representatives. An explanatory qualitative study was conducted using the multi-contact strategy, which involved the following stages.

The purpose of the first stage was to become acquainted with the respondents’ background and professional responsibilities related to intercultural contacts, and to select those people who are involved in intercultural projects with various partners on a regular basis. A questionnaire in Estonian was sent by e-mail to 25 managers of local municipal governments requesting the following information: 1) name, position, area of main responsibilities related to intercultural communication. 2) Cultural and social background. 3) Main experiences connected with intercultural interactions (nature of contacts, length, particular outcome if any). 4) Educational background and courses, programmes or training related to intercultural communication. After obtaining the replies by e-mail, the information was examined. 18 respondents whose experiences and background matched the survey’s goals were selected as specialised informants for further contact.

The goal of the second contact was to more deeply explore the nature and content of the respondents’ relatively recent intercultural business interactions of a persuasive nature, and to obtain their feedback on the effectiveness of these interactions. (The meaning of “persuasion” and “effectiveness” in the communicative context was explained to the respondents).

The second contact was made in person, when I distributed printouts of the interview questions to the respondents, who were given a chance to clarify their answers to questions formulated in Estonian. English translations of the interview questions are presented in Appendix 1.

The replies were analysed and the reported experiences were grouped using Scollon’s politeness system factors (Scollon et al. 2012:52–53). The relationship between the parts to be discussed at the next stage of

the research can be described as:

- Distance: Plus-D (as having equal power within their systems but rare contact with each other).
- Power: Minus-P (as neither one is considered to hold a hierarchically higher position). No gender differences are involved.

Only interactions with the same gender representatives have been chosen for analysis.

According to Arbnor and Bjerke (2009:136), the methodological aims of the dialogue are to clarify differences in which participants can reflect on their original points of view, and go beyond their original opinions. The use of dialogue has an advantage over interviews in getting “at meaning and significances in the co-actors’ language and culture” as it is not just collecting data, which are facts (Arbnor and Bjerke 2009:196). Considering these aspects, the dialogue was conducted in order to obtain a deeper insight into Estonian intercultural persuasive communication, to identify the “other side’s” persuasive style from an Estonian perspective, and to learn about communicative discrepancies and adaptation strategies. Notes were made during the discussion, which was held in accordance with the outline provided in Appendix 2. The participants presented some cases, which were briefly described in their earlier replies to the interview questions and which I selected for analysis. The narrative inquiry approach (Holstein and Gubrium 2012) was then used to analyse the managers’ experience. This qualitative technique focuses on interaction between the source and receiver, and on the ways in which informants interpret their interactions with foreigners. It allows the researcher to uncover rules and regimented practices (Reissman 2008) from the source’s perspective and to track the structural regularities of how persuasive phenomena are organised.

The persuasive communication was about future co-operation in connection with:

- organising mutual visits or exchanges in the field of education;
- developing the service sector and relevant training;
- delivering and spreading information further to other members of the community;
- attracting the business sector to social projects.

The basic ideas and assumptions in the dialogue outline were derived from the replies to the interview questions.

## Results

The results are described below and discussed in accordance with three main theoretical concepts. The managers’ perception of the “other side’s” persuasive styles is introduced, and the main communicative discrepancies are traced. Finally, the peculiarities of the adaptation strategies are explained.

The managers, from their position as source, revealed that the message “what to say” was at the centre of their attention. Therefore, elements (particular pieces of information) and structure (“getting things in a right order”) (Berlo 1960:23) were important for leading the “other party” to the desirable conclusion. All of the managers recognised the importance of “small talk” (2–3 sentences about weather, travel, cultural heritage), and 100% agreed with the statement that there is a particular order for how the “topic should be served” so as to make it be more “convincing” (Johnstone 1989, 2008). All described the preferred order they use to present an idea: small talk, background information, main idea based on facts and figures leading to a conclusion. They strongly prefer questions, remarks, suggestions or any other reactions from the receiver after the presentation. The treatment of the message (Berlo 1960; Johnstone 1989, 2008) can be expressed in the words of one respondent: “I’ve tried to talk about real things, straight to the subject, using as exact expressions as I can, so that everything should be clear even to a hedgehog”. The main idea of the message code (Berlo 1960; Johnstone 1989, 2008) was “to keep it short, plain and simple”, so that facts “will speak for themselves” as to why both sides will benefit from the co-operation.

When describing the “other side” involved in transactional persuasive communication, and by turns performing the source and receiver roles (Barnlund 2008), managers often used the generalised descriptive term “southerners”. These results are summarised and related to three main theoretical concepts in Table 3.

**Table 3. Estonian managers’ perception**

<b>“Other side” of communication process, number of cases</b>	<b>Derivative of Berlo’s “model of ingredients of communication: <i>message structure, content, code</i></b>	<b>Johnstone Preferred Persuasive Styles: <i>evidence, connection, presentation of ideas, main accent</i></b>	<b>Gudykunst AUM theory: <i>predictions and explanations regarding strangers’ behaviour</i></b>	<b>Language of communication, language skills (own and partners’)</b>
<b>Bulgarians, 2</b>	Too much talking with facial expressions, which do not match verbal message	Jumping from subject to subject with no clear connection between issues	Predictions based on previous travel and leisure experiences	Russian,  Good or very fluent
<b>Georgians, 2</b>	Too much talking, loudly, with a lot of gestures	Too intense, pushy  Talking with many exaggerations, expressively	Predictive messages about timing: longer presentations and breaks than planned	
<b>Serbians, 2</b>	Too much talking with facial expressions, which do not match verbal message	Jumping from subject to subject with no clear connection between issues		
<b>Croatians, 2</b>	Too much talking, loudly, with a lot of gestures	Talking with many exaggerations, expressively	Expected difference in communication patterns: more aggressive, pushy, emotional, talkative approach	English,  Satisfactory, was not serious obstacle
<b>Italians, 4</b>	Containing too many personal remarks, compliments, wordy explanations  Too much talking, loudly, with a lot of gestures	Jumping from subject to subject with no clear connection between issues Getting to core of proposal is tiresome Talking with many exaggerations, expressively	Predictive messages about timing: being late	

<b>Arabs, 5</b>	Not serious enough, containing too many personal remarks, compliments, wordy explanations Too much talking with many exaggerations, loudly, expressively with a lot of gestures, facial expressions which do not match verbal message	Too intense, pushy Jumping from subject to subject with no clear connection between issues  Getting to core of proposal is tiresome		
<b>Irish, 1</b>	Not serious enough, contain too many anecdotes, jokes	Getting to core of proposal is tiresome		

In the case of the intercultural contacts described above, Estonian local municipal representatives were not sure they could decode the feedback (one exception was an Irish colleague, who expressed his attitude to the proposal verbally). Almost 80% mentioned the other party's body language as the confusing factor, and could not tell for sure if the content of their message was understood in the way it was intended as there were no clear actions following the contact. The main problem from an Estonian perspective was how to achieve the right self-positioning and to maintain interest in the co-operation after the initial contact. The majority (83%) agreed that to cope with these problems, they would stress their professional capabilities by re-presenting the essence of their project in a very clear, short, logical way, so that nothing "irrelevant" would confuse the receiver.

To conclude, the following adjustments took place: to the message structure (more precise with the units about particular information and exact requests or proposals); to the message content (more compact, skipping all irrelevancies); to the message treatment (more accomplished statements, more measurable, numerical information) and to the code (finding the most "exact" definitions). The channel in 66% of the cases was adjusted by providing a written message about the content of the presentation afterwards (by sending an e-mail with a summary of the proposal).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The study was guided by three propositions, which will be discussed and evaluated according to Whetten's (1989) interpretation and *Cooper and Schindler's* (2008:64) definition that propositions may be judged as true or false. This qualitative study aims to understand the communication process and the experiences of managers within particular intercultural contexts, and 18 knowledgeable specialised informants were used as a sample.

Preferred persuasion style (Glenn et al. 1977; Johnstone 1989) and effective communication (Gudykunst 2003a) are well-defined cultural domains. According to Bernard (2012:175–176), 18 specialised informants is sufficient to understand the content of phenomena. Whether propositions are supported or rejected emerge from the data analysed primarily using the interpretive and constructivist paradigm.

The first proposition was supported:

***P1. Performing as a source in persuasive business communication, the Estonian manager mainly uses a quasi-logical style with some elements of presentational and analogical styles.***

The investigation confirmed that there are individual differences in using the presentational and analogical elements, but the preferred persuasive style of Estonian managers is mainly quasi-logical. The creation of evidence is based on facts and figures; ideas are presented in a structured way and are united by formal logic, which leads to the persuasive claim and normally is expressed verbally and clearly. Presentational and analogical elements were mainly used for small talk, introductions and conclusions (e.g. to bring historical parallels in the development of the countries).

The second proposition was supported:

***P2. The Estonian manager in a receiver position evaluates the presentational and analogical persuasion styles as containing inappropriate emotions and irrelevant information.***

The review of the literature on persuasion showed that from all of the cultures involved in the current investigation, only the preferred persuasive style of Arabs has a clear classification in academic journals (Glenn et al. 1977; Johnstone 1989). The evidence was consistent with the proposition, that Estonian managers mainly use a quasi-logical persuasive style, and research suggests that they have found differences in communication patterns with representatives of Bulgarian, Italian, Georgian, Serbian, Croatian and Irish cultures. The nature of the reported differences refers to the presentational and analogical preferred persuasive styles discovered and researched by Johnstone (1989). Differences were characterised as behavioural tactics not suitable for business discussions and the topics discussed, and primarily referred to stronger than what would be “appropriate” emotional reactions. According to Trenholm and Jensen (2008:108) “all human behaviour has the potential to create meaning” and interpersonal communication occurs in a specific situation. If nonverbal behaviour is given priority over verbal message it might be the source of miscommunication (Schachner et al. 2005). Illustrative “stories” and “talking too much” were identified as disturbing factors, so issues connected with a larger information flow than the situation “required.”

As the dominating amount of presentational and analogical elements is a burden, and disturbs communication, reducing its effectiveness for Estonian managers in their receiver positions, it is logical to react by reducing those elements to a minimum in response to being in the source position.

The study supported the third proposition:

***P3. To raise the effectiveness of business communication, Estonians will increase the quasi-logical orientation of the persuasion style, reducing the presentational and analogical elements to a minimum.***

Estonian representatives of local municipalities connected the issues of communication effectiveness with self-positioning and maintaining the connection for possible future co-operation. The main concern was how to be taken seriously enough by a partner from a larger country, which represents a larger area with a much greater scale of activities. Therefore, adjusting the message to sound more business-like and often using a less personal channel (e-mailing the essence of the proposal after a lack of a feedback from the partner) is one way to raise the effectiveness of the communication from the Estonian perspective.

## **Implications**

The theoretical contribution of the study is that it introduces one of the first efforts to unite the preferred persuasive style concept with Gudykunst’s AUM theory of effective communication (2005) in the intercultural environment. It has provided an insight into the persuasive communication process from a quasi-logical perspective. By investigating the perception of alternative styles, the paper confirms the findings of Gudykunst (2005) that the effectiveness of communication with strangers depends on the accuracy of predictions and explanations regarding their behaviour. In addition, this research suggests the importance of clearly defining, accurately predicting and explaining our own communication patterns. This will provide an insight into all components of the communication process, revealing the main differences and that it would help to “mindfully recognise and correct the errors” in communication

(Gudykunst 2005:306). In terms of the development of business communication theory, the paper indicates the contiguity of the quasi-logical preferred persuasion style with low-context communication patterns (Hall 1959; 1976).

The research offers several practical solutions for managers. First, it provides guidelines for managing anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural interactions, leading to more effective communication. Managers can accurately predict and explain an intercultural communication process by identifying their own preferred persuasive style and recognise the features of alternative styles in the behaviour of foreign partners. The findings support more straightforward recommendations for practitioners from cultures with a quasi-logical preferred persuasive style, and as the study indicated it can equally be advised for low-context business cultures. In order to raise the effectiveness of communication with partners that use alternative preferred persuasive styles, sources should adopt more presentational and analogical elements. Attention during the communication process should focus on the message treatment and code, rather than the structure and content. The stress in a communication preparation process should be on studying the sub-elements of the other party (communication skills, attitude, knowledge and social and cultural systems).

The study complements previous findings (van Zolingen et al., 2012) that divided intercultural communication training into five areas: adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with host country nationals, adjustment to the general non-work environment, adjustment to local culture, and adjustment to the local context. The development of flexibility in regard to persuasive styles can be implemented as an integrative part of adjustment to the work. To make communication more effective and minimize errors, the manager will mindfully (Gudykunst 2003 a:26) increase the presentational and analogical persuasive elements in the situation when decoding the feedback is problematic.

## Limitations and future research

The study does have some limitations, which could provide inspiration for future research. The pertinence of the methodology used in the paper was proved by earlier investigations and prominent scholars, stressing that the source possesses control over the communication process. In this study, this means relying entirely on self-reporting, which increases the chance of a bias on the one hand, but on the other hand, it provides emic explanations. It would be interesting to complement these findings with research from the receiver's perspective (from "the other side"). Future research could examine this topic theoretically and empirically from alternative cultural perspectives, which prefer presentational and analogical persuasion styles. Further, the current results were obtained in a specific socio-cultural context of Estonian local municipalities, and the researched representatives, mainly women aged 28–47, were involved in particular fields of activity. This constrains any generalisations from the findings due to gender, age and specialisation limitations, but calls for further investigation using samples with different demographics. The current study took into account the P and D factors of the communicative parties; it would be interesting to analyse the inter-gender communication influences in addition.

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## Appendix 1. The interview questions

Previous to our dialogue session, please, provide the directions for our discussion by answering the following questions:

1. Name, position and nature of intercultural contacts (if you want to clarify previously recorded information):
2. What kind of persuasive intercultural communication you've experienced in connection with your job? What was the hierarchical position of the participants? Were you communicating regularly or with the rare contact with each other?
3. Please, provide other details you consider to be relevant (personal or group communication, type of the project, your role in it, nature of the arguments).
4. Please, mention what were the most confusing issues in that practice? Identify at least three.
5. How in your mind those issues can be explained (give any hints you think might be relevant)? What was your reaction (solution) to improve the situation, to make the communication more effective?

## Appendix 2. The dialogue outline

Topics discussed	Ideas and basic assumptions	Researcher task
Estonian intercultural persuasive communication	Most attention was paid to message and particularly to its structure (to make things short, exact, correct and clear is the normal intention).	To figure out: How evidence is constituted, what warrants are used, how ideas are formulated, how the conclusion is presented.
“Other side” persuasive style from Estonian viewpoint	Often decoded as “aggressive”, “flood of words”, message content unclear or lack of content (not seeing any “structure” behind words).	To clarify: cultures involved, ability to predict and explain behaviour of the “other side”.
Main communicative discrepancies		To learn: accuracy in predictions' of strangers' behaviour, ideas about feedback.
Main adaptation strategies	Getting straight to point, repeating main idea in brief, simple methods, putting it plainly, so it's “easier” to understand.	To investigate: what sub-element in message construction and how it is adapted, logic behind this adaptation.

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