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“A study of power relations in the working environment of Austrian expatriate executives & managers in India.”

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Abstract

This research project explores the intersection of international business and South Asian studies. Motivated by my co-supervisor's expertise in the department of South Asian studies, I decided to delve into the realm of international business with a specific emphasis on cultural challenges. The research focuses on the cultural challenges faced by Austrian expatriates in leading positions in India, highlighting a significant research gap. Moreover, this study analyses expatriates in an emerging country, an area that has received limited attention in academic literature.

The study also examines the concepts of power dynamics, leadership, and hierarchical structures, prior to emphasising the significant power distance observed in India. This power distance can potentially give rise to difficulties and conflicts between Indian and Western employees. Furthermore, thorough study has been conducted on the post-colonial history of India, which continues to influence many aspects of the country's sociocultural environment.

The data collection involved secondary research from business journals and website articles, as well as primary data gathered through semi-constructed interviews. Thanks to the preparation of the in-depth interviews beforehand, critical themes about the experiences of the Austrian expatriate managers and executives were explored, including the Indian working environment, cultural challenges, and power relations.

The study concludes with key findings which suggest recommendations for future expatriates planning to work in India. Finally, it concludes with acknowledging some limitations of the research and suggesting potential area for further research.

Keywords: International Business, South Asian studies, India, Power relations, Expatriates, Executives, Culture, Power Dynamics

Abstrakt:

Diese Forschungsarbeit befasst sich mit Inhalten von der Internationalen Betriebswirtschaftslehre und der Südasienkunde. Aufgrund der Fachkenntnisse meines Co-Betreuers im Bereich Südasienkunde, entschied ich mich, die kulturellen Herausforderungen im internationalen Arbeitsumfeld in Südasien zu erforschen.

Die Arbeit untersucht den Umgang mit Machtverhältnissen im Arbeitsumfeld österreichischen Führungskräfte die einen Auslandseinsatz in Indien haben oder hatten. Somit konzentriert sich diese Studie auf die kulturellen Herausforderungen, mit denen österreichische Führungskräfte in Indien konfrontiert sind, und deutet damit eine bestehende Forschungslücke auf. Darüber hinaus analysiert diese Studie Führungskräfte in einem Schwellenland, ein Bereich, der in akademischen Literaturen nur wenig erforscht wurde.

In der Studie wird auch das Konzept von Machtverhältnissen, Leadership und Hierarchie erörtert, bevor die Machtdistanz in Indien hervorgehoben wird, die zu Herausforderungen zwischen indischen und westlichen Mitarbeitern führen kann. Zudem wurde die postkoloniale Geschichte Indiens erforscht, die nach wie vor viele Aspekte der soziokulturellen Eigenschaften des Landes beeinflusst.

Die Datensammlung umfasst sowohl Sekundärforschung aus wissenschaftlichen Artikeln und Website-Artikeln als auch Primärdaten, die durch halbstrukturierte Interviews gesammelt wurden. Dank der Vorbereitung der Interviews im Vorfeld konnten kritische Themen über die Erfahrungen der österreichischen Führungskräfte erforscht werden, darunter das indische Arbeitsumfeld, kulturelle Herausforderungen und Machtverhältnisse.

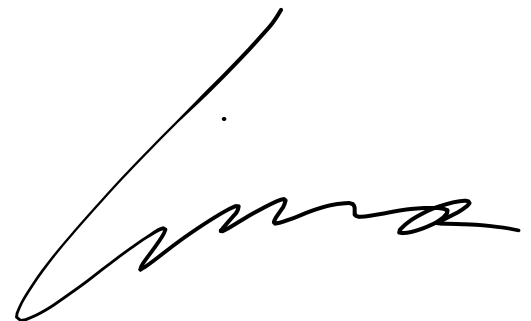
Die Studie schließt mit Empfehlungen für zukünftige Führungskräfte, die nach Indien arbeiten gehen ab. Abschließend wird auf einige Begrenzungen der Studie hingewiesen und es werden Bereiche für weitere Forschung vorgeschlagen.

Schlüsselwörter: Internationale Betriebswirtschaftslehre, Südasienkunde, Indien, Machtverhältnisse, Führungskräfte, Auslandseinsatz, Kultur, Machtdynamik

Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm that I have written this Master Thesis all by myself.

Citations from authors are clearly marked and mentioned in the bibliographical references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, sweeping initial 'L' followed by a series of connected, stylized letters.

Signature

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1. Introduction

“Globalization is the acceleration and extension of the interdependence of economic and business activities across national boundaries” (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p.3). One of the outcomes is that there are now more expatriates worldwide than there were previously; this study will partially focus on this group of economic actors. Due to the expansion of global operations, there is a stronger demand for their skills today, thus it makes sense that the number of expatriates has grown (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022). India, the country I focus on in this study, has drawn a lot of foreign direct investment (FDI) and expatriates since the beginning of the 20th century. Furthermore, it underwent privatizations and reforms in 1991, enabling it to become more accessible to the outside world and facilitate commerce worldwide (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). Currently India holds the fifth-largest economy in the world and is one of the nations with the greatest economic growth. Today’s 7th largest country continues to face economic, social, and environmental issues even with a prospering economy (WKO, 2022). The same is true for expats from different cultural backgrounds, as India has been noted as the third-most challenging country for expats to adapt to after China and Brazil (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). In addition, my research topic, studying expatriates and their experience, is something that other scholars were interested in as well. However, most of these studies concentrates on businesses and expatriates from the west. My research focuses on expatriates living in developing nations in the global south, such as India in my case. Countries like Brazil or India are becoming more significant, and research on expatriates in these emerging countries is required (John O Okpara, 2016). Since Austria is a good example of a western industrialized country that has been increasing its corporate presence in India, this study focuses on Austrian expatriate executives and managers who work or have worked in India. Additionally, very little research has been done to comprehend how expatriates in leading positions in India attempt to fit into the culture (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). Austrian expatriates going to India are likely to experience cultural challenges, on both a personal and professional level. The purpose of this study is to analyse the difficulties and experiences faced by Austrian expatriate managers and executives, with an emphasis on their power relations with Indian co-workers.

1.1 Research objective

This research aims to gain more knowledge about how expatriate managers and executives interact with Indian co-workers in an emerging country like India. This is significant as it illustrates a subjective rather than an objective power hierarchy. Those who are on the receiving end of the hierarchy might experience power relations very differently, whereas executives may be completely oblivious of how employees may perceive the power distance. Additionally, this research contributes to our understanding of how challenges in India, particularly those related to power, relate to the cross-cultural adaption of expats. The trends and behaviours of expatriates in the workplace have been examined in previous research. However, there is a scarcity of literature on expatriates in relation to power in emerging countries. More research is needed to fill the gap that exists between expatriates in powerful positions and cultural differences (David M Brock et al., 2008).

The following research question has been formulated:

What challenges and experiences do Austrian expatriates face when they are in an executive or management position in an emerging country like India and how do they navigate power in their working environment?

In order to support this research, the following sub questions were created to address the research question:

- How is power defined in a working environment?
- What challenges do western/Austrian expatriates face when working in India?
- What are the key strategies for effectively managing power dynamics as an expatriate executive or manager in India?

The research question was addressed by a qualitative study. To be more specific, semi-constructed in-depth interviews were conducted with Austrian expatriate executives and managers who are or have recently stayed in India. This sheds light on how they managed the power distance and navigated power in a cultural setting that was not their own.

The findings of this study are meant to contribute to existing literature on expatriate management and power dynamics. Additionally, there are insightful observations about

foreigners in executive roles and suggestions for managers and expatriates who plan to work in India in the future.

1.2 Structure of thesis

After giving an introduction on the topic and followed by the research objective, the subsequent chapter provides the relevant theoretical background surrounding the expatriates, the concept of power, leadership, and hierarchy. Furthermore, it describes the Indian society, which provides background information regarding the topic, and it outlines the cultural challenges that expatriates are likely to encounter in India. The methodology and the details of how data was collected are provided in the following section. The discussion and the limitations are presented in the chapter of the methodology, Finally, the recommendations and the conclusion are presented in the last chapter.

2. Literature review

2.1 Expatriates

A business that expands internationally sets up foreign subsidiaries by greenfield investment, (where a company sets up a new firm in a new market with 100% control), by acquisition (where a foreign existing company is acquired), or by joint-venture (where a new company is set up with a foreign joint-venture partner by dividing decision rights and ownerships rights) (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022). When a business establishes subsidiaries in foreign countries, it has the option to either employ residents of the host country or assign an employee from the company's home country. The assigned workers are often referred to as either expatriates or immigrant workers. The terms "expats" and "migrant workers" can be easily mistaken when referring to those who work abroad. Considering the scope of my research, which focuses on expatriates, it is crucial to provide a precise explanation of this term and establish the distinctions between expatriates and migrant workers. Firstly, both terms are differentiated by the duration of the relocation and the assignment. Secondly, both are separated on their level of skill. Migrant workers are often engaged in manual tasks associated with seasonal work, such as labour in agriculture and other related fields (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022). Whereas an expatriate is a professional who holds advanced skills and extensive experience and resides and works outside of their home country for a specific period, determined by the length of their assignment (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022). Moreover, expatriates are recruited to occupy leading

positions to oversee a team in the host country and to transfer specific knowledge (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022). The recruitment selection of a company for a foreign subsidiary is influenced by various factors, such as the degree of dissimilarity between the host country and the home country as it can be linked to different approaches. The polycentric model involves selecting local individuals from the host country to manage the subsidiary (Chitakornkijasil, 2010). The advantage of this approach is beneficial, since the cultural approach of the host country will not be a major challenge (Chitakornkijasil, 2010). Communication and exchange with local stakeholders can flow without difficulties. However, selecting this approach can present challenges due to cultural differences, language limitations, and time zone disparities with the headquarters (Chitakornkijasil, 2010). This can make it hard to build a strong relationship with the executives of the company's home country. The other approach to staff a subsidiary is the ethnocentric policy where the leading positions are filled by employees with the same nationality as the parent company (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022). This approach is mostly executed when a company wishes to preserve a certain corporate culture, which is one of the many tasks of the assigned expatriate manager (Chitakornkijasil, 2010). The advantage is that internal communication and process is faster. Nevertheless, employing expatriate managers can be expensive and may face the risk of not efficiently dealing with cultural challenges in the host country. In many cases human resource management requires the implementation of a training program for prospective expatriate managers, wherein they are educated on the social norms and cultural disparities of the destination country. The decision to assign a local host or an expatriate to certain tasks in a host country depends on the multinational company's objectives in that area. The decision must be made with careful consideration, as expatriate failure can result in both direct and indirect expenses (such as strained relations with the host country, negative impact on employee morale, and the loss of an employee to a competitor) (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). For example, in order to provide local resources, one must possess local knowledge and local connections which is better suited for a local manager (Chitakornkijasil, 2010). Whereas, implementing a firm's strategy requires expertise and comprehension of the multinational company. In this case, employing an expatriate manager would be the most suitable choice.

There exist various categories of expatriates that occur when discussing them. "The traditional expatriate, typically an experienced executive, is selected for his/her managerial or technical skills for a period that usually lasts between one and five years" (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p. 630). Usually, they are assigned to take on developing managerial tasks. In some cases,

expatriates in this category may eventually be considered as “permanent expatriates” (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p.630), who extend their stay in the host country or even settle for good. Then, expatriates who are assigned to short-time assignments are considered as “Temporaries” (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p.630). Their occupation in a foreign setting lasts up to a year. Lastly, there is the “virtual expatriate” or also known as the “frequent flier” (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p.630), who switches between the home and the host country back and forth, but does not settle in the host country (Minbaeva, D. B. & Michailova, S., 2004). Digital communication is the tool which is used to stay in touch with the colleagues in the host country (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022).

Working outside of their home country in a culturally different setting presents challenges for expatriates as they “learn the rules for appropriate behaviour in a foreign setting, they repeatedly face discrete situations involving cultural differences that test their ability to function successfully in the new setting and their comfort with new cultural rules” (Andrew Molinsky, 2007, p.1). There have been numerous studies on expatriates’ adjustment in the recent years. However, the majority of these studies have been conducted in the west. Despite the significant challenges faced by foreigners in adjusting to emerging countries such as Asia or Africa, there has been limited research conducted on expatriates in these regions (John O Okpara, 2016). Moreover, existing studies analyse the influence and impact of culture on an organisation, but there is a gap of understanding regarding how an expatriate's perspective towards the culture evolves after living in a foreign society (S. A. Danisman, 2014).

Due to globalisation, the number of expatriates is growing, particularly in emerging countries like India, where there is an increase in the number of overseas subsidiaries (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). Until today the cultural diversity of India is posing some major challenges for expatriate managers to overcome.

2.2 Power relations

2.2.1 Exploring the notion of Power

Another theoretical framework which needs to be introduced is the notion of power. There are plenty of different ways to define power. Furthermore, power is used and perceived differently depending on where it is exercised.

A well-known French critical thinker of the 20th century, Michel Foucault developed theories on power and came up with explanations that have had a significant impact on social science. Through his various works of literature, he contributed to the understanding of power. Foucault's famous quotation: "power is everywhere" (Foucault 1988, p.12), demonstrates his view on how power goes beyond the traditional hierarchical structures and changes the perception of thinking of it as a tool for suppression and control (Jonathan Gaventa, 2003). For example, he argues that power is spread all over the facets of society and acts through social interactions rather than being held by only certain individuals. Since power is and was used to exclude, command, suppress, censor, or even force people to do things for the purpose to have control over them, it is frequently seen negatively. According to Foucault, "power can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society" (Gaventa, 2003, p.2). Moreover, power enabled social discipline and conformity to flourish in communities. Of course, there are other theorists who debate the subject of power; some identify with Foucault, while others reject his beliefs. Nonetheless he is the one who influenced the notion of power the most and that is the reason why I decided to include his perspective on power in this study. Furthermore, I analyse the power relations between western expatriate managers and the Indian co-workers. According to Foucault, power is exercised not only by those in positions of authority, but also frequently occurs in everyday social interactions, as in the case of the Indian culture, which I discuss in detail in a later section of the theory. Finally, Foucault's theories go far beyond what has previously been stated. But for this study, the summed-up passages of his work apply to a working environment, on which I am focussing on in this research.

The French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) is another academic who made significant contributions to our understanding of the concept of power. His perspective of power differed from that of Michel Foucault. He argues that power is not just created through power and control, but also through cultural and symbolic means (Bourdieu, 1986). In addition, according to Bourdieu, power is fundamentally ingrained in social institutions and is wielded through many forms of "cultural capital," such as knowledge, skills, education, or culture. As people with a greater amount of cultural capital are more likely to hold positions of power and authority, the various forms of capital determine an individual's position in society (Bourdieu, 1986). When dominant groups in a community impose their beliefs and values on others to influence and control their behaviour, they shape the social reality and create dominant ideologies such as hierarchy and domination (Martti Siisiäinen, 2008).

Bourdieu's approach to power dynamics emphasises the concept of "habitus," which encompasses an individual's established habits and thought patterns. Habitus is formed through prior experiences and socialisation with others (Navarro, 2006). For instance, a person's perspective and tastes are influenced by his or her social class, education, and cultural background. As established in the previous section, expatriates must possess a distinctive set of skills and knowledge, as they are appointed by a company to assume managerial or executive positions in another country. The Austrian expatriate executive and managers I interviewed have a great amount of cultural capital and therefore they were appointed to hold a position of authority. In the methodological part, it becomes clear how the power dynamics are significantly shaped by the expertise, which affects the way the Indian co-workers interact with the Austrian expatriates. Moreover, it demonstrates how social class and cultural background can influence the power distance between individuals. Therefore, it was important to me to include Bourdieu's view on power as well.

Overall, Bourdieu and Foucault have a different approach when it comes to "Power". In contrast to Foucault, Bourdieu's method placed a strong emphasis on structural and class-based dimensions of power relations. The Bourdieu analysis also highlighted the connections between power and social standing, financial resources, and cultural capital. His work sheds light on cultural capital which is a source of inequality among classes. Foucault, on the other hand, concentrated on the decentralized and distributed nature of power. Finally, they provide several perspectives to comprehend the complex nature of power and how it functions in society.

In the following section, I examine the power dynamics in the working environment in order to study the expatriate's leading positions.

2.2.2 Power dynamics in a working environment

Power dynamics refers to the way power is perceived and exercised (Patricia Bradshaw & Jaap Boonstra, 2008). Focussing in this research on power dynamics in the working environment, it is essential to consider the stakeholders involved, such as co-workers, clients, vendors, and so forth. There is always a certain power dynamic between the many stakeholders, such as between a manager who is responsible for major decisions and an employee. In an organisational setting, using power effectively requires having control over relevant power

sources, like being the CEO or a manager, in order to persuade others to act towards the company's goal (Patricia Bradshaw & Jaap Boonstra, 2008). Furthermore, assuming a position of authority "implies the legitimate authority to use positive and negative sanctions such as rewards and coercion" (Patricia Bradshaw & Jaap Boonstra, 2008, p. 100). In addition, the leading position gives them the "the ability to control the behaviour of others and to change the organisational structure and processes" (Patricia Bradshaw & Jaap Boonstra, 2008, p. 100). The power dynamics is often manifested by giving direct commands, such as task assignments, deadlines, or project completion guidelines. Hence, the subordinate is expected to adhere to the superior's directives and comply with his instructions due to the hierarchical relationship between them. The control systems are designed by the management to monitor the performance of the employees and illustrates the dynamics of power and control within an organisation. In a corporate setting, an organisation follows a code of conduct that requires discipline, order, and professionalism as necessary components of achieving goals. Foucault analyses the development of management and supervision in "Discipline and Punish (1991)" and presents them as typical illustrations of disciplinary functions (JP Deranty, 2020). During the industrialisation in the 18th century the management of companies had to modify the working environment and adapt it to changes. "As the machinery of production became larger and more complex, as the number of workers and the division of labour increased, supervision became ever more necessary and more difficult" (Foucault, 1991, p.174). The difficulty of monitoring was examined by Foucault, who noted that "new sciences, techniques and regulations, new architectural designs and modulations of time were constantly invented and refined to observe, train, control, shape, surveil and punish workers" (Foucault, 1979, p. 174). There were many different approaches, but (Foucault, 1991, p. 174) writes that "what was needed was an intense, continuous supervision that ran right through the labour process (and that) also took into account the activity of the men, their skill, the way they went about their tasks, their promptness, their zeal, and their behaviour." Since technology advanced quickly and the volume of manufacturing increased over time, supervision was and continues to be of utmost importance. So, according to (Foucault, 1991, p.174), "surveillance thus became a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power." Nowadays the methods have evolved and are still evolving in order to ensure a prospering business. For instance, in today's business world, leaders manage employees by using managerial methods like performance evaluations or monitoring. In summary, a workplace is, in Foucault's view, a network where power interactions take place through the application of monitoring and supervision techniques that

the workers submit to both psychologically and physically. These methods establish hierarchies, which are strengthened by the knowledge and competence developed by the disciplined workers. Foucault's studies continue to serve as a source of inspiration for other scholars, offering insights on how to understand the significance of work in modern lives (JP Deranty, 2020).

2.2.3 Leadership & hierarchy

“Power is inherent to leadership as it gives rise to, and maintains, hierarchy among the members of the group or organization” (Richard Mitra, 2020, p.1). Leadership is closely linked to power relations, since power is exercised by leaders while supervising, directing, or controlling. Richard Mitra argues that having leaders "that are supposed to exercise the vested power for smooth functioning of the organization" (Richard Mitra, 2020, p. 1) is crucial for any organisation. Leadership is a topic which has always been in the interest of scholars. However, when I discuss leadership in this study, I specifically refer to organisational leadership. The executive authority that I am focusing on in this study corresponds to that of a CEO, a director, or a manager. It is crucial to reiterate that leadership itself is not intrinsically good nor bad, as was previously mentioned in the section on "power." On the one hand, it can contribute to good things like changing the organisation for the better or inspiring and encouraging the staff. On the other hand, it can be viewed negatively when someone abuses their position of authority, for example by manipulating or oppressing their co-workers. However, as a company's leader embodies the vision and paves the road to achieve a common goal, leadership is more often perceived as a positive thing. “Overall, in an organization, the role of the workers is distributed and each of them fulfil different tasks and they all have to function in a harmonious way to reach their common goal” (Richard Mitra, 2020, p.3). Furthermore, an organization is not just run by one person, but by a group referred to as the board of directors or the management team (Richard Mitra, 2020, p.3). The powerful individuals who hold those positions oversee many different tasks, but making decisions is one of their primary responsibilities. “The leader can make these decisions alone or the management, depending on the situation and cultural perspective of a leader” (Richard Mitra, 2020, p.3). Decisions are made from at the top of the ladder and executed by the those below. It is observed that any company has an organisational structure that “determines relationships between the different activities and the members, and subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks” (Richard Mitra, 2020, p.3). Such a structure is what we also know as hierarchy, which is (in

most cases) built like a pyramid, with the executive or the manager occupying the top position. “A hierarchy shows the organizational levels and the authority-accountability throughout the organization, where a position on top has more authority (power) than a position below” (Richard Mitra, 2020, p.3). They vary from country to country or there may be some variations in the power distance, which we will address later. However, until today there is still no exact definition nor an agreement on how to define leadership. It is important to consider the many forms and viewpoints of leadership. Worldwide the research on leadership is still expanding (Richard Mitra, 2020). Nonetheless, many researchers developed different theories about leadership, which they attempted to categorise. As a matter of fact, a range of leadership styles have been constructed. As this study focuses on organisational leadership, I am only going to give a brief overview over a few leadership styles that are the most appropriate for a working environment in order to provide more information for this study.

A first type of leadership is the transformational leadership, which represents the traditional type of leader who inspires his team members to go above and beyond expectations while equipping them with the necessary skills (Bass, 1997). The leader guides his employees towards a common goal. Leaders who practice transformational leadership are known for being charismatic, smart, and inspirational.

Then, the situational leadership is a type of leadership when “the leader to be successful, he/she has to be task oriented and relationship oriented” (Khalil Ghazzawi et al., 2017, p.2). According to this theory, every worker has a unique work style and is different from one another. Therefore, a leader must be able to adapt, and "different situations should be handled in different manner since every situation has its own characteristic" (Khalil Ghazzawi et al., 2017, p.4).

In a later section of this qualitative study, I analyse the responses of those in managerial or executive positions who must exert leadership. Additionally, they currently or previously reside in a foreign country where different leadership styles are applicable to them.

2.3 Culture

Within the framework of cross-cultural interactions examined in this study, the concept of culture is defined more broadly to include the complex and dynamic factors that influence the interactions between Austrian expatriates in executive or management roles within the emerging Indian subcontinent. Pierre Bourdieu's views on "cultural capital", a scholar which I mentioned in a prior chapter when defining "power", serves as a lens to help understand the unique cultural resources that expatriates bring to their professional roles as they must adapt to a new setting privately and professionally. Just to recall it, Bourdieu's definition of "cultural capital" describes the non-financial social assets like knowledge, skills and education that people possess and use to successfully build social structures. Furthermore, Bourdieu developed the concept of "cultural capital" to make his readers comprehend how cultural resources are unequally distributed and leveraged in society. He views culture as a fundamental instrument for the reproduction and justification of social inequality rather than merely a collection of ideas, customs, and artifacts (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, according to Bourdieu, symbolic capital, of which culture is a component, defines a person's position in society and is something that people own and put together for social advantage (Bourdieu, 1986). Additionally, "cultural capital" concretizes embodied and objectified cultural resources. Skills and knowledge acquired through socialization and schooling are only a few examples of embodied cultural capital. Goods and belongings with symbolic value, such as books or artwork, are examples of objectified cultural capital. Due to capital's unequal distribution, inequalities in culture emerge (Bourdieu, 1986). As previously stated, an individual's "habitus" embodies their preferences and habits, which shape how they behave and what they think (Navarro, 2006). It thus reflects people's social situations and positions since cultural capital is included into its formation. This affects their preferences, choices, and behaviours and contributes to perpetuate social inequality. In summary, Bourdieu's understanding of culture transcends conventional categorisations. As defined by him, culture is a type of capital that plays a role in the reproduction of social hierarchies. It encompasses embodied and objectified cultural resources and is intricately connected to habitus and as well as how individuals navigate and interact within society. Within the context of this theoretical framework, this study clarifies how a cultural background can influence the relationship, the communication, and the power dynamics between Austrian and Indian co-workers within the working environment. In addition, to provide a more insightful understanding of the interaction between the countries this study also delves into post-colonial perspectives. Colonialism left a significant legacy that

frequently affects power dynamics and communication styles to this day. These post-colonial reflections shed light on the challenges that Austrian expatriate encounter when engaging professionally with Indian colleagues.

2.3.1 Cultural dimensions Hofstede

Cross Cultural management

When a corporation establishes a subsidiary in a foreign country, it is likely that they may send local managers or staff members abroad. This necessitates a good understanding of cross-cultural management, which focuses on understanding and navigating individuals within new cultural settings (Hollensen, 2011). In fact, it acknowledges how cultural differences might affect different parts of business, like for instance decision-making, organisational structures, communication, and leadership styles. Understanding the goal of this cultural framework, creates the ability to manage an organisation in a global environment, to promote a successful collaboration and to reduce cultural misunderstandings. Nowadays it has become quite common for companies to send out expats who must understand the local culture in order to successfully cooperate with a subsidiary in a culturally different environment. Since they no longer operate in their own cultural context, expatriates must now be able to work effectively in a greater range of cultural settings, many of which are very different from their own and could easily go against their core principles and beliefs (Molinsky, 2007). Many things can go wrong when working with a country where the cultural beliefs and behaviours are completely different. The adaption helps to avoid uncomfortable situations which can have negative consequences on both the company and the expatriate. Therefore, adapting to the host country's culture can only be beneficial. "It can also increase the likelihood of positive impression management outcomes such as fitting in, being well-liked, and winning the respect, trust, and friendship of clients, colleagues, and subordinates while also sparking a positive spiral of interpersonal communication within a given professional relationship, for example, subordinate and superior" (Andrew Molinsky, 2007, p.2). For instance, in a client meeting where two countries of different background come together, "successful adaptation can have an immediate, positive impact on an organization's success" (Andrew Molinsky, 2007, p.2). Therefore, it is recommended that human resource management of a company provides a training to any expatriate it sends out to a foreign subsidiary to prevent miscommunications or failures of adaptation. Geert Hofstede's, study makes use of cross-cultural management to help

navigate and understand cultural differences at a workplace, which is more widely established in the next section.

Elements of Culture

To provide a better understanding of cultural differences, Hofstede's "cultural dimensions" (1980) is mentioned in this study, since it includes a part which I am focusing on, namely power distance. However, Geert Hofstede was a famous Dutch psychologist, who conducted research on cross-cultural communication and management. He conducted the study by launching an employee survey at IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) in 72 countries and in 20 different languages (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). As a result, he received 116.000 questionnaires, which employees completed throughout the time of the study (2 rounds 1967 & 1973). He initially identified four cultural aspects in "Culture's Consequences" (1980): individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity (Hofstede, 1980). Long-term vs. short-term orientation and indulgence vs. constraint are two new dimensions that have been added over time (Hofstede, 2016). Hofstede's dimensional model is one of the most frequently used models for comprehending and comparing cultural in the fields of International Business. Therefore, a society requires the six fundamental components to function, and to assess them, the dimensions are given on a scale that ranges from 0 to 100 (Hofstede, 2011). As mentioned, the two countries we will be focusing on in this study have different cultures. Hofstede's model makes it easier to analyse Austria and India from an international business point of view.

An online tool named "the Hofstede Insights" allows to compare every cultural dimension between any countries. The following illustration illustrates a comparison between India and Austria:

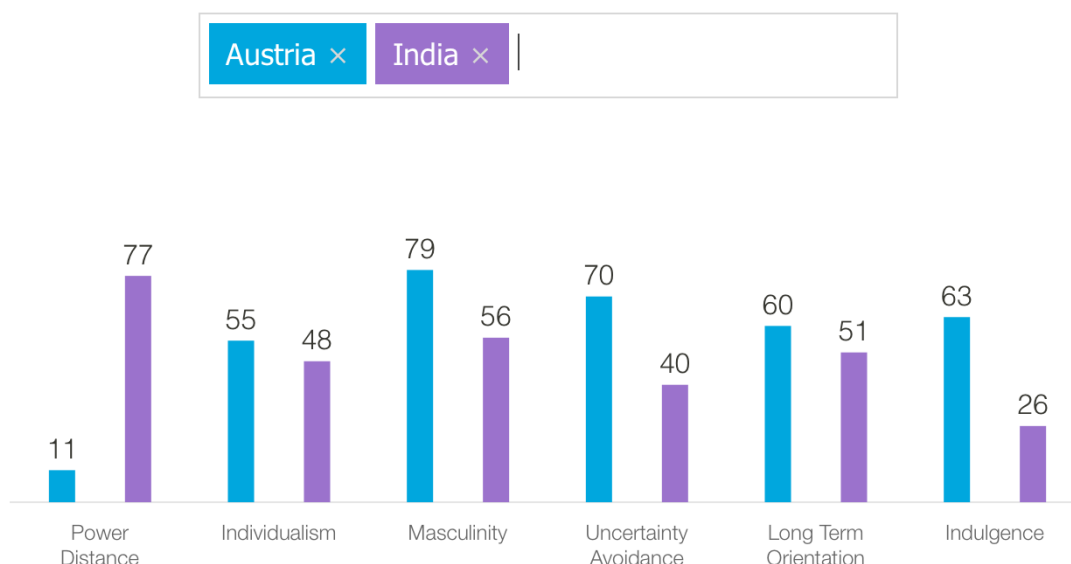


Illustration 1: Power Distance between India & Austria (Hofstede et al., 2023)¹

Uncertainty Avoidance

There is always a certain degree of risk involved when someone is faced to a decision. The perception of risk varies from place to country, whereas some are more comfortable taking risks and others prefer to avoid taking risks. This is referred to as the "Uncertainty Avoidance, which can be related to a country's willingness to take a risk, whether the people prefer formal rules and fixed patterns of life or not" (Hollensen, 2011, p. 245). Countries who have a high Uncertainty Avoidance are worried about the unknown and try to "establish protective barriers or to simply avoid uncomfortable occasions in the future " (Hollensen, 2011, p. 245-246).

The illustration above indicates that Austria receives a score of 70 and thus has a high level of uncertainty. It is a country that avoids unnecessary risks and weighs all available facts before acting. In the western culture the emotional need for security, accuracy and punctuality are highly valued (Hofstede, 1980). Prior to making a decision, these factors are carefully considered.

India performs significantly worse than Austria, scoring 40 on the uncertainty avoidance scale. It demonstrates that there isn't a great level of uncertainty avoidance. There's an expression in India that says nothing has to be perfect and that things don't always have to go according to plan (Hofstede, 1980). Put differently, imperfection is just fine. India is also renowned for

¹ <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/fi/product/compare-countries/>

being a patient country and where the ability "to adjust" is ingrained in many aspects of life². For example, regulations are frequently bypassed, and solutions are found to resolve complicated circumstances. For some this attitude can be a blessing and for others it can become a problem.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

This dimension illustrates whether a nation's citizens act selfishly or collectively. Individualistic countries prioritise their own interest and the interest of their relatives. Privacy and personal needs are very important to them. Conversely, nations with collective behaviour are associated with systems of social inequality and, as a result, have strong ties to other members of the society. Harmony among co-workers is crucial, and connections take place over assignments in a workplace (Hofstede, 2010).

Austria scores 77 points on the scale and is rather an individualistic country. They tend to keep things private between themselves and their close families. Moreover, in the working environment the relationships between employees and management are strictly professional. Merit determines decisions like such as staff recruitment and job advancement³.

India scores 40 points and combines both collective and individualised traits. On the one hand, Hofstede claims that Indian people like to be part of a social group. This pattern of behaviour might be linked to one's identification with religious groups or their birth into the caste system, which is common in India. Further elaboration on this topic will be provided later. Often, the actions of an Indian individual are influenced by family members or by his employment.

Specifically, in the workplace, the employer-employee relationship is characterised by the employee's anticipated loyalty, which guarantees the employer's providing of security for the employee's family. The individual aspect of the rather collective Indian culture can be explained by the religion which prevails the life of most of the Indians. Hinduism is the most practiced religion in India and whose adherents hold to the concepts of reincarnation and karma—the notion that every action has both positive and negative consequences that affect one's destiny in the hereafter. Therefore, seeing it from that aspect every individual is

² <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=austria%2Cindia>

³ <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=austria%2Cindia>

responsible for his own destiny and how to live a life in accordance with the “Hinduism way” for example⁴.

Masculinity vs. Feminism

This dimension represents if a country is success oriented and if “status symbol” is important or not. For instance, “Masculine countries have a favour in society for competition, achievement, heroism, money, assertiveness, and material reward for success” (Hofstede, 1996, p. 108; Hollensen, 2011, p. 246). Employees in such countries have a strong desire for status and are more outspoken and self-assured. Whereas feminine countries tend to be more reserved and sensitive (Hofstede, 2010). In organisations, employees of feminine countries tend to adapt, cooperate, and have the ability to compromise (Hofstede, 2010).

The score of 79 clearly shows that Austria has a strong inclination towards masculinity and is very success oriented. Austrians place great importance on success and hard work⁵.

India, with a score of 56, is likewise a rather a masculine society and success-oriented country. When it comes to power and success India is especially male driven. However, here again, religion plays an important role. The Indian culture is so diverse and is one of the longest lasting in the world. Many religious members of the Indian subcontinent uphold the values of humility and abstinence (Hofstede, 2010).

Time Perspective, Long-term Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation

This cultural dimension measures a culture’s focus on the past, present, or future. Countries which prioritise long-term strategic planning, such as Austria, attach great importance on timing and future preparation. They possess the ability to adjust and be pragmatic in response to culture and evolving customs (Hofstede, 2010).

India's score on the scale is 51, which is only slightly below Austria's score of 60. Nevertheless, religion significantly influences several cultural features inside Indian civilization. Consider Hinduism as an example, where its practice is more related to a life philosophy rather than a religious belief. Traditions such as prayers, festivities, and rituals are practiced and held in high

⁴ <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=austria%2Cindia>

⁵ <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=austria%2Cindia>

regard. On the other side, India has flexible future oriented ideals to reap long-term rewards (Hofstede, 2010).

Indulgence vs restraint

The most recent cultural dimension refers to “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised”⁶ (Hofstede, 2018).

Austria with a score of 63 is considered an indulgent country. Austrians tend to have a positive attitude and appreciating life by prioritising leisure time (Hofstede, 2010).

India has an overall rating of 26 on this topic when compared to Austria, indicating a tendency towards restraint. The Indian society is known for having very strong self-control over their desires and for not rewarding themselves greatly with leisure time. Their tendency towards pessimism arises from their conviction that societal norms impose control over them and that indulging in enjoyment is indicative of wrongdoing (Hofstede, 2010).

Power Distance

This cultural dimension is the one which interests me the most, given that this study examines the power distance between two countries. Power distance is the degree of how much people of a society or of a culture accept that power is distributed unfairly among them in organisations (Hofstede, 1984). In other words, power distance can be used to measure the degree of inequality in society (Hofstede, 1997). People's autonomy is emphasised in low power distance countries since authority is viewed negatively there. In low power distance countries, for example, the fact that supervisors encourage staff members to actively participate in conversations to share their opinions demonstrates the equality, or seeing eye to eye (Hofstede, 1984).

As the score on the power distance scale increases, the level of tolerance towards social injustice and unequal distribution of power in a country also increases. Countries with high power distance reflect a social structure in which individuals are assigned certain roles and superiors are expected to be treated with respect. Moreover, countries with a significant power distance tend to be inclined towards centralised decision-making (Hofstede, 1984).

⁶ <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=austria%2Cindia>

Austria holds a very low score in power distance, indicating that they value equal rights and independence (Hofstede, 1984). At work, power is decentralised where managers and the co-workers collaborate closely to achieve a common goal. Moreover, the one in the executive role is accessible and communicates directly (Hofstede, 1984).

India has a remarkably high score of 77 in this cultural dimension and is known for having a culture that encourages a significant power distance. According to Hofstede, Indians are familiar with a hierarchical organisation characterised by a top-down approach. Indian organisations employ a hierarchical decision-making process characterised by concentrated power, limited one-way communication, and restricted participation (Javidan et al., 2006). Furthermore, in India there is a greater social, economic, and political distinction and those in positions of power demand and expect to receive obedience (Javidan et al., 2006). At work employees expect to get guidance and instructions, hence it is customary for them to comply with the directives of the executives (Hofstede, 2010).

As we can see, there are considerable cultural differences between Austria and India, and when an Austrian company wishes to enter the Indian market, it must apply a different strategy. Illustration 1 demonstrates that the biggest difference lies in power distance. As proposed by Harrison and McKinnon (1999), “future research should dig deeper into the meaning of culture variables such as power distance, and extend and hone the use of these measures to help explain organizational and managerial phenomena in the cross-cultural context” (David M Brock et al., 2008, p. 1305).). The upcoming chapter focuses on India and explores the origins of Indian culture as well as their business practices. Moreover, it provides insight into the historical foundations of India, specifically delving into its post-colonial history as a potential explanatory reason for the behavioural patterns expressed by the Indian population. Furthermore, the Austro-Indian relationship is examined in order to gain a deeper understanding of the reasoning behind selecting these two countries for this study.

2.4 India

2.4.1 India today

The previous section has provided a glimpse into how the Indian society might be perceived from an international business point of view. Nonetheless, from a sociological and historical point of view the Indian subcontinent demonstrates a high degree of diversity and cultural richness that goes beyond casual observation. India underwent significant changes following its independence on August 15, 1947. Currently, India is the 7th largest country on earth, surpassing China to become the country with the world's largest population⁷. Furthermore, in 1991, thanks to economic reforms, India opened to the rest of the world and attracted many foreign companies (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). The world is focused on its developing economy and investments are being made in sectors such as technology, construction, pharmaceuticals, and vehicles (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). Nevertheless, the most notable changes, which are of relevance for this study and what India is known for in the West, relate to its culture. Until today India is known for its diversity in terms of cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religions. Nevertheless, there has been a shift in culture in recent years due to factors such as economic reforms and globalisation. In the Indian society, gender roles have historically been defined, with women occupying a subordinate position compared to men. (Richa Awasthy et al., 2021). Still a lot of women do not have the choice to choose their occupation, as societal norms continue to dictate that a woman's role is primarily that of a housewife (Richa Awasthy et al., 2021). However, an important development in recent years is the changing gender dynamics in the workplace, with women increasingly having the opportunity to pursue careers in a wide range of industries. Furthermore, women are now occupying leading positions, which was once unimaginable decades ago. In a prior section, I characterised India as a collective society, following their family's orders and religious groups. However, it appears that there is a shift from the collectivist position to a more individualistic position (Richa Awasthy et al., 2021). The younger generation in India demonstrates discontent with the nation's collectivist tendencies and criticises the numerous social rules and regulations they are obliged to follow. Simultaneously, they witnessed a growing approval of cohabitations among couples which gained legal status not so long ago (Richa Awasthy et al. 2021). This example illustrates only one case of the shift of changing social attitudes towards personal choices, relationships and

⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/desa/india-overtake-china-world-most-populous-country-april-2023-united-nations-projects#:~:text=153%20from%20the%20United%20Nations,more%20than%20double%20in%20India.>

arranged marriages. Traditionally, arranged marriages and cohabitation are highly valued in the Indian society. On the other hand, the mentality has changed as a result of modernisation, globalisation and the exposure to the Western culture. This attitude is to be witnessed especially among younger people. Furthermore, India has long been portrayed by the West as a mysterious and exotic country characterised by its rich culture and vibrant traditions. However, this Western perception of India has changed over time, resulting in an evolution of India. Nowadays, India is often associated with being the innovative centre of information technology (IT)⁸. A huge number of high-qualified professionals emerged as experts in the field and are now working all over the world. Moreover, the Indian subcontinent is known for its leading position in the pharmaceutical industry. When the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, it showed to the world how reliable it is as they ensured a vast supply of medicines and vaccines during a challenging time⁹. By now, the developed nations in the West have perceived India as a leading high performing nation in certain fields of business. Although India has made significant progress in technology and economy, it is still considered an emerging country by due to its socio-economic topics such as poverty, infrastructure, and religious traditions prominent in rural areas, which represent a huge amount of the Indian population. Moreover, the Indian culture is and remains one of the oldest and richest cultures in the world. “The country is getting modern touch through its people but still such modernization cannot outdate the value system” (Richa Awasthy et al. 2021, p. 140). Even though changes are happening, “data indicates that culture in the rural India still upholds Indian traditions such as collectivism, hierarchy, arranged marriages, and exhibit high family orientation whereas urban India is a combination of traditionalism as well as modernism” (Richa Awasthy et al. 2021, p. 140). These rural areas continue in preserving their rich culture, which may appear to contradict the progress of an advancing society. Nonetheless, there is a rising recognition of India’s potential for development and growth in the years to come, due to its quickly growing economy and rapidly developing middle class¹⁰.

⁸ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

⁹ <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/pharma/the-indian-pharmaceutical-industry-a-remarkable-journey/103303320n>

¹⁰ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

India compared to Austria

Austria is classified as a developed country, in contrast to India. It places strong emphasis on the tertiary sector, which includes domains such as business development, financial activities, health, and education (Statistics Austria, 2022). Despite being an emerging country, India still faces social challenges such as poverty and inequalities. Access to healthcare and education in India is not common to everyone, particularly in rural areas. In contrast, Austria provides education, access to healthcare and ensures social security to its population (Statistics Austria, 2022). Historically, Austria has a very rich cultural past influenced by Western Europe. Austria is a linguistically and culturally homogeneous country, comparable to other German-speaking nations. In contrast, India is renowned for its cultural diversity, encompassing hundreds of languages, diverse ethnic groups, and a wide range of religions. The Indian history is rich and complex, which dates back a thousand of years. Moreover, India has a historical period of colonisation lasting for more than two centuries, which is further elaborated upon in a later section of this chapter.

The part on cultural dimensions briefly discussed the Austrian workplace culture and behaviour, based on Hofstede's studies. However, here are further elements that define their workplace behaviour which provide a more comprehensive understanding:

Firstly, punctuality is considered a crucial aspect of the Austrian corporate culture. Consequently, it is crucial to be punctual for work or starting a meeting at time. Furthermore, the work-life balance of Austrian employees is another valued trait. They place great importance on taking some time off from professional responsibilities and dedicating that time to spending with loved ones or pursuing personal interests. Another characteristic commonly found in Austrian corporate culture is a preference for avoiding close connections among co-workers. Individuals tend to maintain a high level of privacy regarding their personal lives, mostly sharing only work-related matters (Hofstede, 2010). Lastly, Austria has a notable diversity in leadership, with a significant representation of women in leading positions¹¹. Austria is committed in promoting gender equality and diversity in the workplace, whereas it is not the case in many developing countries. The empirical chapter compares these characteristics to the business culture of India, observing differences between Austrian and

¹¹ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

Indian co-workers. However, it is worth mentioning that when it comes to the business organisation in Austria, companies are usually well-structured following protocols and procedures. Indeed, a main characteristic shared by the Austrian and Indian corporate cultures is the presence of a hierarchical structure, where distinct tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined. Nevertheless, there exists a significant difference between the two nations in terms of power distance. The section below provides a detailed description of the high power distance in India, including its potential origins.

Before delving into the Indian business culture, I would like to briefly reflect on their colonial history. An examination of the historical context can provide insight into specific significant patterns, such as their interaction with Western individuals. It also emphasises the significance of considering their colonial history for this study.

2.4.1 Post-colonial

This section provides insight into the post-colonial history of India, which might explain some behavioural patterns observed among the Indian population. Before India emerged as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies, the country has undergone a remarkable historical journey that has greatly shaped its current state. India underwent a historical process of colonisation by several nations, including the British, Portuguese, Dutch, and French, before becoming the sovereign country it is today (McLeod, 2015). Consequently, it was subjected to exploitation, forced to learn foreign languages, and imposed to new cultures on multiple occasions¹². Nevertheless, the British rule was the most significant one given that it involved direct governance from 1858 to 1947 (McLeod, 2015). This ruling period was named the British Raj (“Raj” meaning rule in Hindi) (McLeod, 2015). Hence, this specific period was marked by a significant amount of hardship and suffering. Although it seemed that British colonial rule had a beneficial impact on economic developments, such as investments in infrastructure (especially in railways), promoting and commercialising (Harald Fischer Tiné & Maria Framke, 2021), teaching and implementing English (McLeod, 2015), it is crucial to understand that these actions were primarily motivated by self-interest on behalf of the British authorities. The British colonial rule exploited and exercised power on the Indian subcontinent by taking control over the economic, political, and cultural aspects (Stein, 2010). In 1947 the

¹²

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/colonialism#:~:text=Colonialism%20is%20defined%20as%20%22control,cultural%20values%20upon%20its%20people.>

British decided to withdraw from India, marking the end of the British rule and the establishment of India's independence (Castro Varela & María do Mar, 2015). However, the British colonial rule left long lasting economic, political, and cultural effects. The current socio-economic disparities did not emerge overnight. The persistence of historical inequalities in former colonies in Asian or African countries is mostly due to the accumulation of these disparities. Indeed, these places were deprived in their development as a country due to the presence of extractive institutions, which generated wealth by exploiting the colonised countries (Daron Acemoglu, 2017). It is not really a coincidence, that African or Asian societies are linked with poverty and unstable political circumstances (Daron Acemoglu, 2017). Furthermore, post-colonial scholars argue that these structures perpetuate systemic racism, as they were built upon racial hierarchies and continue to reproduce and reinforce racial inequalities. The lasting consequences of power imbalances and racial prejudices ingrained in colonial economic frameworks have significantly influenced intercultural communication and management. These influences have shaped opportunities, decision-making procedures, and the distribution of resources within businesses. Overall, a post-colonial perspective emphasises the need for sensitivity, cultural awareness, and a recognition of historical legacies when engaging in cross-cultural communication and management, in my case between Austria and India. It requires an understanding of power dynamics, cultural hybridity, historical struggles, and the complexities of the colonial experience to promote effective and equitable intercultural engagement. This is only rarely the case since colonialism established economic systems that favoured the colonisers and perpetuated racial hierarchies.

Nonetheless, the end of the colonial rule marked the birth of post-colonial theory, a critical framework that analyses social, political, economic, and cultural repercussions of colonialism (Bibhash Choudhury, 2016). Numerous studies have thoroughly analysed postcolonial India, focusing on the consequences of the factors resulting from the British Empire's colonial control. Some of the most significant scholar on Indian post-colonialism are Dipesh Chakrabarty and Homi K. Bhabha.

Dipesh Chakrabarty is a renowned historian and post-colonial thinker known for his contributions to the field of post-colonial studies. He points out the significance of acknowledging and rectifying the historical inequities caused by colonialism. In the context of cross-cultural communication and management, this entails acknowledging the power dynamics and economic exploitation that occurred throughout the period of colonial rule. His

work “Provincializing Europe” gained a lot of attention from post-colonial-theorists, as he criticised the Eurocentric perspective which holds the most dominant one in historic and social sciences: “For generations now, philosophers and thinkers shaping the nature of social science have produced theories embracing the entirety of humanity. As we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind” (Chakrabarty, 1992, p.3). Chakrabarty explains that non-western countries possess a unique history that cannot be compared or aligned with the history of Europe. Furthermore, he addresses the historical imbalances that arose from colonialism and stresses the significance of incorporating the history of subaltern groups, who endured oppression during the colonial rule. In his opinion, colonialism had lasting impacts on the societies which were occupied, shaping not only their unequal economic or political structures, but also their knowledge and behavioural patterns. Chakrabarty advocates for more awareness regarding the history of countries who were colonised, as well as recognition of the long-lasting negative consequences that persist to this day. Using Chakrabarty’s view on colonial legacies, I aim to investigate how the unequal power distribution from the past shape Indian organisational structures and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, I seek to demonstrate how the power dynamics in India are shaped by its history of resisting colonial domination (Chakrabarty, 1992).

In addition, it is my aim to shed light on the power dynamics and inequalities between colonised and those that have engaged in colonisation, particularly in the context of cross-cultural communication. Homi K. Bhabha is a historian and post-colonial theorist who has made substantial contributions to the field of postcolonial studies. The term “mimicry” is employed by the author to explain the phenomenon in which a colonised group imitates and adopts the cultural values, characteristics, and languages of the colonisers (Bhabha, 1994). For example, English education was forced upon the Indian population during the colonial period as an attempt to become a “modern individual”, also known as, “European” (Chakrabarty, 1992). Despite the colonised population’s attempts to embrace and imitate the customs of the coloniser, their attempts were judged as exaggerated and were not perceived as being truly “European” (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha proceeds by explaining that the coloniser did not acknowledge the effort to keep a submissive relationship with the colonised in order to illustrate the imbalance of power, which is still present to this day.

Considering all these factors, the different aspects of post-colonial theorists enabled me to examine some of the consequences on behavioural patterns of Indian people in the working environment.

Hierarchy: Caste system & Power relations

A caste refers to a social hierarchy within a particular group. In India, a hierarchical order exists, dividing the society into four castes: Brahmins (priests), Ksatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants) and Shudras (workers). Additionally, there is a group called Dalit, also known as the Untouchables, who are people outside the traditional caste system who occupy professions which taint ceremonial rituals (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Although this system is still very much practiced in India, the gap has decreased over time. “India’s former status as a colony of the United Kingdom for approximately 100 years may have also played a role in supporting cast differences” (Amarjit Gill et al., 2010, p.1). Some scholars of the postcolonial theory claim that the British are responsible for the perpetuation of India’s caste system, as it is still present today (Amarjit Gill et al., 2010). In the past, however, “a new construction of caste [...] augmented colonial power, while undermining the colonized subject” (Sushil Mittal & Gene Thursby, 2007, p.293). The British officials used the method of classification to rank various castes hierarchically, subsequently reorganising it, in accordance with their own imagination and policies, therefore creating social hierarchies based on race, class and gender (Sushil Mittal & Gene Thursby, 2007). That influenced the relations among Indians and created a lot of conflicts. The British Raj disregarded the Indians and enforced their educational and cultural ideals upon them through forceful methods. Further, they exercised their influence with such great power, resulting in significant societal transformations and enduring hardships that have defined India’s society as it is today. Nowadays, hierarchal structures are part of the everyday social interactions, religious practices and cultural norms of Indians. Each individual within a society holds a distinct role and collectively contributes to its functioning as a whole. “India’s historical caste system contributed to this high cultural power distance” (Amarjit Gill et al. 2010, p.1). The high-power distance, which was mentioned by Hofstede (1980) might have come from India’s long colonial history. Furthermore, it is possible that the British might have influenced the power dynamics in India. For example, Indian people use the titles "Sir" or "Madam" while addressing individuals from other countries (Sanjeev Kumar, 2017). During the period of the British rule, it was customary for all Englishmen to be addressed as “Sir” as a means of manifesting their respect, manners and especially the

inferiority towards the English people (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Nowadays in India, the honorific “Sir” is associated with respect, while names are used to address individuals of equal status (Sanjeev Kumar, 2017).

English

Nowadays, over 1500 languages and many other dialects are spoken in India. “Furthermore, perhaps 350 million Indians speak English as a second language. For much of the upper middle class in large cities, English is the usual language of daily communication” (McLeod, 2015, p.7). Today, the official language of India is Hindi, but English is recognised as the government’s second official language since the 19th century when it was introduced by the British. As the British tried to impose their cultural norms to the Indians, it was clear that they could never become “real” English people but only imitate them (Döring, 2008). In one of his works, Homi K. Bhabha discusses the concept of "mimicry" and its application to colonial India: “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p.86). As a result, the Indians questioned their national identity in response to the British empire’s attempts to reshape Indian society according to their ideals and imposed Western values and norms on them, such as forcing them to learn the English language. As a matter of fact, India is regarded as one of the largest English-speaking nations worldwide but only 30% of the Indian population speak fluently English¹³. The reason behind the short-fallen statistic is that many rural areas in India cannot offer a proper English education to everyone because the support and the infrastructure is often missing. English continues to remain the most widely spoken language in the world and is important in both academic pursuits and employment opportunities. Moreover, in an international setting, not having the full ability to speak English might lead to a language barrier or deprived communication which might result in a submissive way of speech, ultimately leading to a greater power distance (Ivana Fisic, 2022). Nonetheless, on today’s labour market Indian workers are renowned not just for exceptional skills in the fields of IT, but also for their excellent knowledge of English¹⁴. Despite the fact that “only” 30% of the Indian population speaks English, the country nonetheless still has a huge number of English speakers that exceeds the number of English speakers observed in many other countries worldwide.

¹³ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/english-language-still-challenge-many-indians-priyanka-modi/>

¹⁴ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

Therefore, the number of Indians working outside of India is also on the rise¹⁵. What seemed to be a disadvantage for Indian people, is transforming into an advantage as the level of English proficiency among the Indian population is increasing.

Furthermore, specific biases may arise, such as a preference for jeans and dresses as opposed to traditional attire such as kurtas and sarees, a preference for international fast-food chains like Burger King over Indian food, or even a tendency to speak English over Hindi (Inderpreet Kaur, 2021). However, my focus was restricted on potential consequences that have impacted the conduct of Indian employees in the working environment when they are around expatriates, especially expatriates in leading positions. Hence, I examined the current Indian working environment in the following section.

2.4.2 Working with Indians

After having analysed the Indian colonial history and the Austrian business culture, I now aim to provide insight into the Indian business culture since it is the main focus of this study. Working in India offers both advantages and challenges. One of the reasons why numerous organisations want to establish themselves in India is the presence of a vast market with abundant commercial prospects and relatively fewer obstacles. In addition, the wide-ranging use of English in the major urban areas facilitates communication and market entry. Nevertheless, it is important to know that the Indian working environment is not one without challenges. Different leadership and communication practices can lead to challenges between Indian and Western employees. “Doing Business in India: A Guide for Western Managers” written by Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi in 2005 is a book which offers Western managers knowledge and guidance on how to succeed in India. It provides pragmatic guidance and strategies for Western managers seeking to successfully engage with India’s culture and business practises. His work helped me to analyse the Indian workplace behaviour and environment. Generalising the work of Rajesh Kumar and Anand Kumar Sethi is challenging due to the diverse ethnic groups, languages, and cultures that exist within India as a country. Therefore, it is not accurate to take their results for granted and applying it to every Indian employee. However, these findings provide a brief overview of the behavioural patterns of

¹⁵ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

Indians in the workplace that were noted by a significant number of observers. Moreover, these results are helpful for my analysis since they emphasise how Indian people communicate in relation to power dynamics.

2.4.3 Power distance

As seen in Hofstede's study, India ranks high on power distance, a characteristic that has persisted over the course of several decades. Furthermore, "research on Indian work culture indicates that high power distance, collectivism, and affective reciprocity are major cultural values of Indian employees" (Amarjit Gill et al., 2010, p.1). However, how do Indian employees demonstrate power distance? What are indicators of a high-power distance within the Indian work environment? Where does this high-power distance come from? As seen in a prior section, the high-power distance might have come from India's long colonial history. In the Indian working environment, "the acceptance of hierarchy engenders a particular style of interaction between the superior and the subordinate" (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005, p.68). The reason behind this lies in the fact that many Indians search for what is commonly referred to as a "sneh-shradha relationship" (meaning in Hindi: faith, trust). In this context the subordinates demonstrate dedication and loyalty towards their seniors, who assume the role of caretakers and providers, ensuring their overall welfare and satisfying their requirements (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). This trait might explain why some authors labelled Indians as a "yes" culture, as Indian subordinates demonstrate a tendency to agree to orders issued by their superiors (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Furthermore, in absence of specific instructions from the manager, Indian employees refrain from taking any action and therefore seek the attention of their superior (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). From a Western standpoint, the relationship characterised by subordination and dependency may be perceived as morally undesirable and unfavourable. From the Indian perspective of the superior, it is essential to not only motivate the subordinate to work hard to achieve organisational objectives, but also to attend to the well-being of employees' family and provide a sense of security. "Indeed, if a leader is able to accomplish this, he will not only get the employee to commit himself to the task, but perhaps even more importantly, the employee will leave no stone unturned to fulfil the task" (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi 2005, p.70). However, establishing such a relationship, or any relationship at all, can prove to be complicated for Western expatriates due to their tendency to draw a line between private and professional life. However, refraining from participating in this kind of

relationship in India may lead to disappointment of Indian subordinates (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Consequently, establishing strong and reliable relationships is a key factor towards a successful business in India, which is discussed again in a subsequent chapter.

2.4.4 Verbal communication

In terms of communication, the Indian society shows significant differences from Western societies, both in verbal and non-verbal aspects. India is characterised as a culture with a high context culture, where the exchange of information is heavily influenced by the surrounding context. This means that people in India put significant importance not only on the explicit verbal content of communication, but also on many contextual factors. For example, they are mindful of the interpersonal relationships they share with their discussion partners. Indian communication patterns are shaped by the dynamics of interpersonal relationships (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Therefore, the hierarchical culture present in India significantly affects the ways of communication used by employees within an organisation. In Indian culture, verbal communication is predominantly characterised by politeness and indirectness, which serves the purpose of minimising disagreements or confrontations. One example is the fear that Indians may feel when it comes to openly expressing disagreement or refusal towards their superiors (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). In fact, there is such a high degree of respect that any criticism or attempt to doubt the superior is avoided. As previously mentioned, the hierarchical structure prohibits a subordinate employee from expressing such sentiments. Similarly, an Indian saying “no problem”, which to them means “I know there will be problems, but I am doing the best I can at my end “(Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005, p.108).

2.4.5 Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication holds equal, if not greater importance to verbal communication, as it often gets overlooked. Misinterpretations of communication can lead to unsuccessful negotiations, limit the development of an effective working climate which gives rise to misunderstandings and can demotivate local stakeholders. Indian people have several non-verbal communication styles which need to be considered by a foreign expatriate manager.

Head wobble

The act of shaking one's head might be the most famous one and is often associated with individuals of Indian descent globally (Sejal Jakhwal, 2023). It could be misinterpreted by people who are unfamiliar with the Indian culture. On the one hand, the movement of shaking the head sideways can mean "yes" or the indication of agreement, however the head wobble can also mean "no". As previously stated, Indians often communicate indirectly, employing the head wobble as a method of politely expressing a negative response without intending to cause any harm or offence. In the Indian culture the gesture commonly used to express disagreement or refusal, which is typically interpreted as "no" in Western cultures, is not intended to be harmful or offensive to the other party involved in the conversation (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). On the other hand, as mentioned earlier Indians have the tendency to speak in an indirect way, the head wobble means saying "no" in a nice manner without wanting to hurt the other interlocuter (Sejal Jakhwal, 2023).

Greeting in India

Greeting someone with a handshake is customary practice that applies beyond the Western cultural context. However, Indians prefer saying "Namaste", which implies bringing both hands together at the chest level and bending the head slightly (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). It is a sign of respect and recommended to use when working in India.

Physical contact

In India, it is observable that Indians maintain a certain distance when interacting with an individual whose social status is higher. As the social status of the person, one is talking to increases, the illusion of social distance between them also increases (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005).

Eye contact

Moreover, it is observed that individuals in Indian culture tend to refrain from engaging in direct eye contact when the person is not of equal status (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005).

The main focus of this section relates to styles that are associated to power dynamics. However, the vast majority of observed behaviour patterns appear to be of subordinate nature.

2.4.6 Business relations: Austria & India

Austria – India relationship

India and Austria have maintained a good relationship for over 70 years¹⁶. Austria is a Western country in Central Europe which demonstrates a future oriented perspective. It invests in many different industries and including India as one of its operational countries.

Economic relations with Austria or Austria's economic relation to India

In 2022, the exports to India achieved a new landmark. The percentage rose to 23,6% and reached an important target of EUR 1 billion for the first time¹⁷. There has been a notable increase across all the export sectors, with particular emphasis on the mechanical engineering and vehicle sector with a share of 44% of Austrian exports¹⁸. Additionally, there was a 24,7% increase in imports from India, particularly in the mechanical engineering and automobile industries¹⁹.

The healthy relationship has thrived for many years, with the oldest joint venture in India dating back to 1965 and is still active. Today, there are about 150 subsidiaries, joint ventures, and representative offices operating in India²⁰.

Business opportunities for Austrian companies

Austria's technological know-how in the mechanical engineering and vehicle sector holds a very good reputation in India. Therefore, industrial modernisation, automotive, and energy industry provide positive business opportunities²¹. Furthermore, Austria actively participates in numerous projects aimed at pursuing a climate-sensitive energy policy²². Hence, it can be concluded that there currently exists an enormous potential for the implementation of ecological technologies in India. Additionally, the need for smart city development, including

¹⁶ <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/austrian-embassy-new-delhi/bilateral-relations/india/>

¹⁷ Indien: Los geht's. Länderreport Aussenwirtschaft Austria 2022 (WKO)

¹⁸ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

¹⁹ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

²⁰ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

²¹ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

²² <https://www.austria.org/position-in-the-world>

both urban and environmental technologies, is high in demand in India, presenting Austria with an excellent business potential²³.

Growth in all sectors:

Foreign companies are operating in India in a wide range of industries such as the automotive, consumer electronics, food processing, telecommunications, financial services, infrastructure, engineering, information technology, biotechnology, entertainment, retail, and healthcare sectors (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Based on the findings of the WKO (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich), the majority of Austrian companies are operating in business activities within the mechanical engineering and vehicle sector in India²⁴.

This section aims to emphasise the importance of mechanical engineering and the vehicle sector as the basis for narrowing down to these industries for this study. The selected participants for the qualitative study, which will be presented in the next section, are all actively engaged in either one of the two sectors.

In summary, the literature review indicates that expatriates in executive or managerial roles living in India should be aware of cultural values that could influence the power dynamics and therefore adapt their leadership approaches accordingly.

The following chapter, containing the methodology, will shape the approach employed in this research.

²³ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

²⁴ Wirtschaftsbericht Indien Außenwirtschaftscenter New Delhi April 2022 (WKO)

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology employed in this paper. Furthermore, it explains the approach and techniques used to conduct the study and aims to answer the research question. The purpose of this study is to gather data from Austrian expatriate managers and executives who have worked or are currently working in Indian subsidiaries of Austrian companies. The main objective is to reflect on their experiences related to cultural challenges, particularly focusing on their experience regarding power relations.

“The aim of qualitative research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in their natural environments. It relies on the direct experiences of people as meaning-making agents in their daily lives and focuses on the why rather than what of social phenomena” (Val Hyginus U. Eze, 2023, p. 20). Furthermore, a qualitative study is designed to collect “non-numerical data in the form of words and generate insights” (Val Hyginus U. Eze, 2023, p. 20). In addition, the data gathered using a qualitative approach offers ideas into perspectives, emotions, and beliefs of an individual (Steven Tenny et al. 2022). By utilising sources such as texts, videos or audios, one might gather deeper insights on different viewpoints or personal experiences (Val Hyginus U. Eze, 2023). There are different ways of collecting the data such as interviews, focus groups or surveys (Val Hyginus U. Eze, 2023). In my case I decided to conduct a semi-constructed interview. Hence, a semi-constructed interview consists of open-end questions that thoroughly investigate a specific topic, along with supporting questions to encourage the interviewee respond freely (Corin Barkey, 2022). Furthermore, the reason why I opted for this method is that “interviewers frequently have the flexibility to make changes, even though they might stick to a general plan and set of questions” (Val Hyginus U. Eze, 2023, p.26). During the interview, a fluent conversation shall blossom, providing the interviewer with the opportunity to add some follow-up questions that enable the exploration of unexpected topics in a spontaneous way (Corin Barkey, 2022). In summary, conducting a semi-constructed interview gives the interviewer the opportunity to be flexible and to gather some in-depth insights about a specific topic. In addition, it is important to prepare an interview guide including a questionnaire in advance, in order to be prepared and to anticipate further questions or further topics.

3.1 Data collection:

Sampling

The qualitative research should provide a deep insight into the topic. Therefore, I chose a purposive sample to identify and select the participants who provide the most effective for this study. “Purposive samples are based on criteria that the investigator establishes at the outset, which describe participant characteristics “and therefore gather individuals with the necessary knowledge and experience to answer the questions (Daniel H. Grosseohme, 2014, p.112). As a result, I conducted a search for participants who met the predetermined criteria and who were willing to participate in the study. This would grant me to collect primary data for the purpose of this research. I limited the number of participants to five. However, an additional participant was included in the study due to the unavailability of one person for an in-person meeting. This participant independently filled out the questionnaire. The goal of the interviews was to collect insights from expatriate executives or managers who possess the necessary expertise, knowledge, and experience to make organisational decisions.

Thus, the following criteria were used for selecting participants:

- Expatriates of both genders occupying a leading position, specifically those in executive or managerial roles
- The individual in question is currently or was formerly employed at an Austrian company that operates a subsidiary in India within the mechanical engineering or vehicle sectors
- Professional experience in India
- The individual has prior experience working within the Indian environment and assuming a leadership role in a team with Indian co-workers

Interviews & the interviewees

The participants selected for the interviews consisted of Austrian executives, managers or former expatriates who held a leading position within an Austrian company operating in India. Furthermore, the focus of this study was limited to companies operating specifically in the mechanical engineering and vehicle sectors. Then, the respective companies employing the participants were contacted via E-mail, and appointments were scheduled to conduct the interviews. All the sessions took place by video calling using the MS Teams platform, with

the exception of one interview with Mr. H. Furthermore, the average duration of one interview was 35 minutes. During the video call, I recorded the content with the intention of generating a written transcript of the interview. Once the interview was over, the transcription was used for the purpose of data analysis. The interviews took place within the time frame of April to May 2023. No audio recording was obtained for Mr. H, as he was unavailable for an interview. Instead, I sent him the questionnaire by E-mail. He filled out the questionnaire independently and subsequently returned it to me. In conclusion, a total of four interviews were conducted in German and two interviews were held in English.

The interview guide, including the semi-structured interview (refer to Appendix 1), was prepared in advance. This involved formulating questions which could bring me closer to answering the research questions. The theoretical part of this study sheds light on power relations, including the complexities of Indian cultural challenges and the post-colonial history of India, with the aim to understand the contextual background. The theory was considered and as a result key themes were identified through the analysis of the interviews:

- Indian working environment
- Cultural challenges
- Power distance & Power dynamics
- Business relationship

The following table illustrates an overview of the participants, including their respective position and the industries in which they are active:

Interviewee	Position	Industry
Mr. H	Managing Director	Mechanical Engineering
Ms. G	Production manager	Mechanical Engineering
Mr. D	International Procurement Expert (Manager)	Mechanical Engineering
Mr. J	Expert International - Finance, Audit and Taxes (Manager)	Mechanical Engineering
Mr. C	Purchasing Management (Manager)	Vehicle sector, technology
Mr. A	International Project Manager	Mechanical Engineering

Among the interviewees, Mr. H is the only person who is considered as a “traditional expatriate”, as he is someone who took on the role as a managing director and settled in India for good. He has been working there now for three years.

Moreover, Ms. G was initially assigned a one-year short-term assignment, during which she was considered as a “temporary expatriate” (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p. 630). However, her stay got extended and she ended up staying two and a half years, which made her a “traditional expatriate” (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p. 630). During her employment, she was responsible for overseeing a team and managing production operations in India.

The remaining interviewees, on the other hand, are considered as “virtual expatriates” or “frequent flyers” (Oded Shenkar et al., 2022, p.630) since they switch between the home and the host country without settling in India.

All of them hold a leading position within their respective company and have either worked or are currently working alongside Indian colleagues. While some of the Indian colleagues occupied the same hierarchical position, the majority worked as subordinates.

Confidentiality

The recorded interviews and documented transcripts are only intended for research purposes, as was previously agreed. Therefore, for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, the identity of all interview participants will be kept anonymous. In the findings, the individuals in question were referred to as “Mr”. or “Mrs”. However, the respondents’ companies and positions within the company are disclosed.

Data analysis

I applied an inductive method to analyse the data, which allowed me to use the interviewee’s experiences as data which served as the basis for the following data analysis (Thomas, 2006). Prior to that, I collected and analysed secondary to generate insights that can potentially be useful to answer the research question. Then, I analysed this primary data, gathered from the conducted interviews, with a thematic analysis. It is used to identify, analyse, describe, organise, and report carious topics or themes that emerge from a given dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is an effective technique to examine the different perspectives of the interview participants that highlights the identification of differences and similarities, hence generating

unexpected insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis is a flexible approach for interpreting information, because it can be applied across many different theoretical and methodological frameworks, as well as it has been extensively used in numerous research questions, methods, and sample sizes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.2 Data analysis: Findings

This chapter involves the essential themes previously discussed, together with the main findings, that are relevant for answering the research question. Prior to listing the key findings derived from the interviews, I revealed the motivation of the executives and managers to go to India, along with their perception and expectation at the time.

Each interviewee admitted having stumbled across cultural challenges during the business journey in India. When asked about their perceptions and expectations about India, all the interviewees explained that they have been to India on multiple occasions prior to working there. That is how they acquired knowledge of some cultural aspects. However, the experience of working in an Indian environment turned out to be a new challenge. Regarding Ms. G has a deep admiration for India because of its vast size, rich historical background, and cultural heritage. Furthermore, she was a bit worried on assuming a leading role as a woman in India, considering the country's largely male-dominated society. Furthermore, she admitted that her job in Austria was not that exciting, prompting her to seek a new challenge. Consequently, she joined the subsidiary in India, acquiring a leading position. Mr. C and Mr. H saw a potential career prospect as they were given the opportunity to take on leadership roles within a team based in India. The potential of business opportunities with higher growth rates encouraged their decision to pursue employment in India. Regarding the remaining interviewees, they were presented with the opportunity to work in a foreign country, an offer that they embraced. Nowadays it has become quite common for companies to expand in culturally diverse settings. As part of this process, companies deploy expatriates who need to absorb the foreign culture with the aim to promote a successful partnership with a subsidiary. As seen in the theory, it is important for the human resource management department of a company to provide training programmes for expatriates being deployed to a foreign subsidiary. The primary objective of such trainings is to prevent miscommunications or failures in adapting to the new environment. Several participants stated that the human resource department of their respective companies provided them with a training curriculum specifically designed to enhance their ability to

interact effectively with Indian colleagues. The training consisted of a range of topics, such as intercultural communication, among others. Nonetheless, the following passages reveal that the training programme was insufficient in getting accustomed to the Indian business culture.

Indian working environment

Even with training offered from human resources departments on efficient collaboration with Indian colleagues or prior knowledge of the country through personal travel experiences, it is impossible to fully anticipate and prepare for challenges encountered while working in India. The working environment work practises in India differ significantly from European standards. The theoretical section of this study contains an in-depth analysis of traits characterised by Indian employees within the working environment. These traits have been mentioned by the interviewees. According to Mr. A, Indians have a distinct approach to work, an opinion shared by all the interviewees. In the context of organisational structure, a striking contrast arises when comparing European organisations, known for their distinct structural frameworks, in comparison to Indian subsidiaries, which Mr. C asserts are managed through a more collective approach. He proceeded by describing the Austrian management culture, where the importance is attributed to following a well-defined path or strategy and achieving clear results. Employees are expected to follow established procedures without engaging in critical inquiry. However, the Austrian work culture may cause discomfort among the Indian people. They seem to demonstrate a higher level of flexibility and collective decision-making, which can contrast sharply with the strict structures followed by the Austrian expatriates. Nonetheless, as Ms. G stated in her interview, “even if I sometimes thought to myself how will this work out? The Indian co-workers made everything work”.

Flexibility

One big challenge encountered by every interviewee during their time in India related to the flexible work culture common among Indians. Flexibility is a defining characteristic in the Indian working environment. As previously discussed in the theoretical section, the notion of time in India is commonly known as “Indian Stretchable Time”, as observed by Ms. G. Some interviewees stated that meetings often started 5 to 10 minutes later than the scheduled time, contrasting with the Western ideals of punctuality and adherence to predefined schedules. Moreover, in the context of flexibility, Mr. H observed that Indian employees tend to request more flexibility in terms of unplanned leavings and occasional tardiness, particularly during

the monsoon seasons. Furthermore, when it comes to requests for overtime or weekend work, Indian workers are often accommodating. Another example of flexibility is the difference in when a workday tends to start in India in contrast to Austria. The workday in India tends to start later than what Austrian people are used to, as observed by Mr. J, who is used to starting his workday very early similar to his peers in Austria. Furthermore, he stated that his Indian colleagues would often gather for collective prayers before attending work. To sum up, the interviewees observed that the flexible ways of the Indians, their approach to time and their adaptability are part of the Indian business culture. These characteristics are customary and shape the dynamic Indian working environment.

English

Effective communication was essential for the purpose to delegate tasks and to ensure the timely completion of work. Many of the participants mentioned that English initially posed a considerable challenge. They encountered some difficulties in understanding the linguistic patterns and nuances of Indian speech and had to adjust accordingly to it over time. Ms. G expressed: “The challenge at the beginning was, I believe, the English. This was a challenge. It was important that the people in the production could speak a little English. Furthermore, it was a challenge that we find people who can speak it, because we are an international company. The basics to communicate if something is alright or is not alright”. Proficiency in English language was essential for her to facilitate effective and clear communication. Mr. D stated: “One of the most difficult challenges was the language. All Indians speak English, but the accent is sometimes difficult to understand.” The Indian accent was a significant challenge not only to him. Despite the widespread use of English in India, the unique manner of speech presented difficulties in terms of comprehension. Patience emerged as key attribute to overcome these language and communication challenges. All participants perceived that progress would be necessary and that longer discussions would be necessary to push the process. Furthermore, motivation played a crucial factor in fostering engagement and commitment among both expatriates and Indian colleagues, enabling them to overcome these communication barriers. Working together in addressing these challenges was crucial for achieving success in this cross-cultural working environment.

Communication

The interviewees emphasised that the communication challenges extended beyond the English language. They noticed significant differences in communication techniques between their

European workplace and the Indian work environment. To assume a leadership role in a foreign subsidiary, the leading person must possess a clear vision and a strong desire to implement the company's work processes. This specific aspect created a major communication challenge in India. Moreover, Mr. A noted that typically one single meeting in Austria is usually enough. In contrast, in India it was common for 4-5 meetings to be necessary in order to thoroughly explain and execute a process. Mr. D, elaborated on the differences of meetings practices observed between the two countries. In Austria, agendas are explained and mostly easily comprehended understood. However, if something is not sufficiently understood, one manifests it in order to perform correctly. In contrast, in India it required a higher degree of communication and the necessity for full explanations of the tasks. The reason behind that is rooted in the cultural norm observed among Indian colleagues to express understanding when tasks were explained, even if they have not fully understood the content. Increased level of communication and exchange was needed and crucial for success. Later, Mr. A emphasised the necessity of assembling the full team, rather than just a couple of workers, in order to complete a process effectively or implement a new process. Furthermore, he continued that it was crucial to provide a comprehensive explanation of the task's objective right from the beginning. Consequently, it became clear that there was a requirement for patience and careful explanations. Mr J. experienced a similar behaviour: "One thing I noticed is that sometimes my Indian co-workers were not able to say that they did not understand something. For example, when enrolling them to a new task they would often shake their head saying yes, but actually they did not understand and shook their heads to say no in a polite manner." These observations highlight the importance of acknowledging and adjusting to diverse communication strategies when navigating within cross-cultural work environments. Regarding India, as mentioned by the participants, there are differences in the work processes and workflow. According to their point of view, the observed speed is comparatively slower.

Cultural challenges by expatriates

In previous chapters, I have demonstrated the significant disparities between Indian and Austrian culture. Furthermore, globalisation has substantially increased the importance of cross-culture management. The executives and managers I interviewed, operated in a different cultural setting, and had to adapt to their new professional surroundings while successfully dealing with a variety of foreign cultural situations. Initially, it is important to mention that

religion was an important factor, according to several managers and executives during the interviews. As previously mentioned by Mr. J, Mr. A lived a similar experience by participating in morning prayers. Moreover, he recollected a request made by a former employee for a two-hour leave every Friday to attend prayers at the mosque. He was concerned about the issue of justice among employees who did not require similar accommodations. Following an exchange with an experienced HR professional, he was advised to grant that request in order to prevent any violation of religious matters, which are considered sensitive topic in India. This incident highlights the importance of religion in India and how it's influence on people's lives, even including work.

Power distance

The manifestation of power distance was observed in various aspects of the vertical Indian organisation culture, as witnessed by all the participants. Furthermore, they noticed that each member of the Indian subsidiary has a clear understanding of their respective role and title, thereby contributing to the establishment of a hierarchical structure.

According to Mr. A, vertical hierarchy is commonly perceived as the existing norm in India, characterised by clear and strict instructions that are both provided and expected from superiors. Furthermore, he experienced that foreign managers or executives who visit India are regarded with great respect, receiving warm welcomes and pleasant treatment. Despite his initial expectation of a vertical hierarchy, he still found it quite unusual and challenging to navigate. One aspect of this hierarchical structure which was quite unfamiliar to him was the custom of employing specific titles when engaging with those of superior status. For instance, as explained by Ms. G and Mr. D, it was custom to use terms such as "Sir", "Boss" or "Madam". Mr. D added that even after getting to know his co-workers, they continued to address him as "Sir", indicating the persisting presence of hierarchical power relations in the communication styles. He also recounted that his Indian co-workers consistently and visibly showed a great amount of respect towards him during their communication. Moreover, he always identified the hierarchical speaker in a conversation based the way they spoke and addressed one another. Most of the interviewees concluded that the higher your position in the hierarchy, the bigger was your role in verbal exchange. Furthermore, many interviewees mentioned the continued presence of the caste system, which is visible in the apparent inequalities observed in the

interactions among individuals belonging to different castes. They witnessed their dedication to social, religious, and cultural elements in defining their position within social hierarchy. During a communal meal, Ms. G and Mr. A witnessed instances of the caste system being strictly enacted through the seating arrangements, which clearly delineated the boundary between the superiors and the subordinates. The executives were seated apart from the other colleagues, which highlighted how the caste system was still relevant in daily life practices at work. The findings of this study highlight the major impact of power distance, hierarchy, and cultural history on the organisational environment in India.

Power dynamics

The Austrian executives and managers demonstrated different approaches when it came to navigating power. The way they executed and engaged in the activity varied.

In the Indian working context, it is customary for employees to expect guidance and direction from their superiors (Hofstede, 2010). Mr. H confirms this claim and added: “For instance it is expected of a Director, that he would delegate the work and give orders and not do it by himself. If certain tasks are done by the Director himself, it would be eventually regarded as weird.” Furthermore, Mr. A highlighted the desire for control and seeking supervision from their supervisors. This behaviour demonstrates the dedication of the executive or the manager and generates a feeling of importance among the subordinates. Considering the hierarchical relationships between the superiors and the subordinates, Mr. H and Mr. A delegated tasks and responsibilities to their Indian colleagues. Mr. A gave an example of a meeting where he presented the goals of the company: “I would lead the meeting and present everything myself. My Indian subordinates would agree to everything I said and neither did they give their opinion or added something. I noticed that a couple of times and never showed any sign of weakness, which would be unusual to them. Therefore, I always gave them strict orders and demonstrated how the things should be done.” In the case that a task was not executed according to his preferences, he expressed his dissatisfaction, since he noticed that “critic is accepted in the lower hierarchy.”

In contrast to the previous two managers, Ms. G used a different approach in managing power dynamics. Leading a team overseas turned out to be a unique and challenging experience to her. Moreover, she pointed out the importance of employing empathetic communication and delivery techniques when giving instructions, in which one effectively communicates their

message without resorting to harshness. She illustrated her way of managing by practical examples of problem solving: “I walked around the production site and took pictures of things I did not like and showed it to my team. I showed it to the production leaders and told them that we have to take care of this and that it has to be clean in a certain way. And it was done.” She expressed her concerns, which encouraged collaborative work environment and ensured the resolution of the problem. In addition, in the event of a quality-related concern, which initially affected the manufacturing site, she drew parallels to everyday life situations: “I gave them the example when buying a new mobile phone, if they would still buy it even with scratches on the screen?” As an outcome, the workers approached the assignment with greater caution as they understood the issue on an emotional and personal basis, resulting in reduction in errors and successful achievement of the goals. Lastly, Ms. G encountered the phenomenon known as the “Indian Stretchable Time!” (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005), which she attempted to solve by using an explanatory approach, providing reasons behind her commitment to punctuality. Her way of dealing with the challenges implied clear communication and solution-oriented methods to successfully adapt to a cross cultural working environment. In addition, she tried to reduce the high-power distance by implementing unconventional approaches that deviated from the “Indian way”. At one point, she introduced the concept of an “open door day”, where anyone was granted permission to approach her desk and engage in confidential discussions for about 10-15 minutes. These conversations were related to personal matters, such as family concerns for example. She believes that by using the previously mentioned method, they were able to lower the power distance and became more approachable.

Mr. J had a similar approach as Ms. G in terms of navigating power within his Indian team. Prior to his arrival in India, he received instructions from his company’s headquarter, which he diligently followed. When he started working there, he noticed that the Indian colleagues had a great deal of respect for their Austrian colleagues. In return, he tried to establish a respectful environment. This approach aimed at facilitating communication and reduce power distance between both parties, with the goal of creating a collaborative working environment. Even though Mr. J was relative supportive towards the new challenges he faced, he acknowledged that action was required when problems arose. On occasion, some colleagues would seek for explanations or excuses to justify their errors uncovered during an audit. Based on some communication patterns, he was able to tell that they were hiding something. If it was the case,

it became apparent that a feeling of fear emerged around his potential disclosure of the matter to the top management.

Mr. D emphasised on his own experiences, which provided him with valuable insights concerning the major differences when it came to decision-making dynamics. In his opinion in the Austrian working environment, employees demonstrate a collaborative and engaged approach by suggesting new ideas or taking proactive initiatives. Whereas, in India, the employees exhibit a more passive attitude, opting to await instructions to minimise the probability of mistakes. This observation emphasises the cultural differences and expectations about managerial power in the workplace.

Business Relationship

Establishing relationships at work can cause challenges for Western expatriates, since they tend to maintain a clear distinction between private and social life. However, every interviewee agreed to the necessity of building a relationship with their Indian counterparts. They acknowledged in time that cultivating a relationship is important to conducting business successfully in India. The methods used by expatriates to cultivate relationships show considerable differences.

Ms. G demonstrated a proactive approach to build a relationship with her Indian team. She had the desire to reduce the power distance by implementing change to the organisational structure. The reason behind this is that her team had a great deal of respect towards her upon her arrival to take over leadership. The distance was apparent, and they did not express their opinion on any matter. Following a considerable amount of time abroad, Ms. G noted that she successfully established an environment within her team where they felt at ease expressing their opinion and openly sharing their thoughts, especially in the professional context. Through participating in social events, such as going out for drinks and having dinner with her team, she fostered a strong eye to eye relationship and mutual understanding with her colleagues. These efforts resulted in a change in the hierarchical structure, which reduced the power distance. Ms. G added: “In the end they all called me by my name”, which is very unusual in India.

Mr. D was another candidate who successfully built a good relationship with his co-workers. He went on saying that “sharing tea or coffee together became a custom and having a beer together after work was beneficial for the working relationship.” Those actions enabled

enhanced communication, hence demonstrating a shift in the power distance. Furthermore, when his colleagues became more acquainted with him, he was even invited to take part in Diwali (festival of lights), which is a very famous Hindu festival in India celebrated by followers of the Hindu faith. It is an important cultural and social celebration, which brings people together and renews relationships.

Mr. C and Mr. J, also talked about their positive experiences in establishing relationships with their team. Mr. J described the progression on how his conversations initially were just about work and how they gradually transitioning into more personal exchanges. Mr. C expressed his willingness to maintain an open-door policy for his team, emphasising the importance of creating a positive working atmosphere. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of after work meetings as a means of promoting unity among teammates. Over the course of time, friendships developed which last until today.

However, not every interviewer shared the same perspective regarding the necessity of building a relationship that goes beyond work. Mr. A and Mr. H highlighted the importance maintaining a certain level of power distance to uphold authority. They were cautious about building too close relationships with their colleagues. Both warned about the potential exploitation of excessive kindness that could be used against you, prompting them to refrain from sharing any personal background information and declining participation in social festivities.

Those diverse approaches used in building a relationship highlight the complexity of navigating power dynamics in a multinational setting.

3.3 Discussion

As indicated in the introductory section of the thesis, India is a country where foreigners with a different background are likely to face some challenges, especially in a working environment. Despite the enormous changes experienced by India due to its rapidly growing economy, in particular following the liberalisation of trade policies in 1991 and the massive influx of foreign companies (Sahiba Sharma and Richa Dahiya, 2017). However, the social structures in the country still bear the marks of historical influences. The previous findings of this research analysed crucial key themes which are relevant to answering the research question and giving recommendations to future expatriates. The main topics covered include the Indian work environment, cultural challenges with a focus on power distance and dynamics, and the

characteristics of business relationships. A thorough literature analysis revealed a significant gap in studying expatriates in emerging countries such as India, despite the knowledge of the substantial obstacles they encounter when adapting to unfamiliar surroundings (John O Okpara, 2016). Furthermore, an in-depth study highlighted the disparity on expatriates in relation to power in emerging countries (David M Brock et al., 2008). The conducted interviews revealed valuable insights into the experiences of Austrian expatriate managers and executives who worked in India. These findings provide deeper understanding on the obstacles encountered by Western expatriates in leading positions in the Indian work environment. Moreover, these findings contribute to the framework of cross-cultural management. Furthermore, this study delves into the complex power dynamics that are present in India, with the aim of addressing the research question. An analysis was conducted on many theories to examine the cultural disparities in power between the two countries. The following section examines the established key themes and compares them to the key findings which were analysed in the previous chapter.

Indian working environment

Flexibility

An occurring challenge encountered by every interviewee in the Indian working environment was dealing with their Indian colleague's unique flexible work style. The Indian work culture exhibits greater flexibility with regards to time, as opposed to the Western world, where compliance to rigid schedules is more common. Flexibility is a defining characteristic in the Indian working environment. Particularly in the context of time, which is also humorously referred to as "Indian Stretchable Time!" (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Furthermore, in India, schedules and timed fixtures are primarily approximations, where many last-minute alterations or postponements occur. As a matter of fact, there is a saying in India that acknowledges the reality that not everything needs to go as planned and that nothing must be perfect, as observed by Hofstede (1980). The Austrian expatriates initially struggled in adapting to that level of flexibility, which was very unusual to them. That is the case, as punctuality holds significant importance in the Austrian business culture. Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi (2005) concluded that Western managers frequently encounter situations in which work, or deliveries promised at specified times and dates do not occur in India.

English

Many interviewees expressed that communication was challenging at the beginning because the English language proficiency did not match the expectation of the managers and executives. Consequently, a language barrier emerged in certain situations. Over time, they progressively adapted and acquired sufficient understanding to successfully work with their Indian team. That is probably due to the different and unique style of English spoken in South Asia where the pronunciation and the accent sound different to the traditional English language. As previously mentioned, India is regarded as one of the largest English-speaking nations worldwide. However, barely 30% of the Indian population possess a high level of proficiency in English, primarily due to the lack of a proper English education in many rural areas. Despite the lower proficiency levels, English is widely spoken and may even be found in certain rural areas. One could argue that India's competency in the language might be even higher than that of Austria, given its significant historical and ongoing exposure to the language. Their unique accent and distinct manner of speaking, which posed challenges for several interviewees, likely derive from their colonial history. Upon reflecting on history, it is evident that throughout the period of colonial rule, the English education was imposed on the Indian people with the objective of transforming them into "modern individual", also known as, "European" (Chakrabarty, 1992). As the British attempted to impose their cultural norms, it was clear that the Indian population could never become "real" English people, but only imitate them, as observed by Homi K. Bhabha. In his work "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse (1984)" the author introduces the concept of "mimicry", to describe the circumstances in colonial India. The people in India were forced to adopt "European" customs and behaviours but were unable to as "they were almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p.86). To this day, the oppressive colonial methods of the British continue to influence many aspects of the country's sociocultural landscape. Nowadays, it is obvious that English is the predominant language used for internal communication in many multinational companies that have established their presence in India. Furthermore, it is an important criterion when it comes to pursuing higher studies or in finding a job. Lacking proficiency in the English language might result in a communication style characterised by submissiveness, resulting in a greater power distance (Ivana Fisić, 2022).

Communication

The verbal communication in India is predominantly characterised by politeness and indirectness, with the aim of avoiding conflicts or confrontation. As witnessed by most of the interviewees, their colleagues were unable to say “no” or to manifest a sign of not understanding something regarding a given assignment. Indians have a reluctance to express refusal towards their superiors (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). The literature review examines how the hierarchical culture and the relationship between individuals in India impact the ways of communication between employees in an organisation (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). The hierarchical relationship restricts subordinate employees from expressing their inability to perform a task or to show signs of struggle to their superior. However, they demonstrate a strong dedication in trying their best, but will not refuse the task given despite potential challenges. The findings offered me a glimpse into several situations where explanations to a task were acknowledged, even though the given instructions were not understood. A common non-verbal communication pattern in the Indian society is the head wobble, which according to the many interviewees, frequently used when a task was explained. As previously noted, Indians frequently exhibit a tendency for employing indirect communication patterns, which includes the distinctive head wobble as a notable component. This gesture might convey agreement, signifying affirmation towards a particular matter, or alternatively, it can serve as a polite technique of expressing disagreement without causing offence to the conversational partner. (Sejal Jakhwal, 2023). During her interview Ms. G related to her personal experience, where she observed her Indian colleagues attentively listening to her instructions while simultaneously shaking their heads. This caused her some confusion as she tried to figure out whether they understood the task or not. To her it indicated a certain degree of distance and reluctance to communicate openly. Nonetheless, those traits in the Indian working environment should not be considered a negative attribute. From a Western perspective, these traits may seem very unconventional, but in reality, these characteristics influence the shape of their workplace. As a matter of fact, all the managers and executives expressed the reliability of their Indian workforce, despite encountering struggles related to their working habits. Nowadays it is important for managers to possess the capacity to operate in a wider range of foreign cultural situations, many of which diverge significantly from their own, potentially leading to conflicts with their core principles and beliefs (Molinsky, 2007).

Indian Culture: Cultural challenges by expatriates

Power distance

The power distance between the two countries has already been established in the literature review. The Austrian society places significant importance on the principles of equal rights and individual autonomy (Hofstede, 1984). Furthermore, the organisational power structure is characterised by decentralisation, wherein supervisors and subordinates work closely together on a common objective (Hofstede, 1984). The interviewees were all used to having a low power distance in Austria where their subordinates would engage in direct communication with them. However, they all encountered high power distance in India as described in Hofstede's theory. The theoretical framework presented by the author illustrates the presence of a significant power distance within Indian society, characterised by a preference for top-down decision-making and hierarchical methods in the workplace. The interviewees experienced several situations where they felt a high power distance between them and their Indian colleagues. The practice of addressing superiors with titles such as "Sir, Madam, or Boss" reflects the deep-rooted hierarchical structure in the Indian working environment. By doing so they acknowledged the supremacy of their superiors. In addition, the team meetings demonstrated a significant power distance, since only the expatriates in positions of authority were given the opportunity to speak. Moreover, another example in which power distance was witnessed occurred during activities such as eating. Several Austrian expatriates experienced unfamiliar seating arrangements where some of the employees were not seated at the same table as them. That example underlines the caste system which is still present and even visible in the working environment. Lastly, it was not unusual that the Indian colleagues expected to be guided and directed by their superiors, as observed by Hofstede (2010). Additionally, it was observed that in Indian workplaces when employees do not receive clear instructions from their superiors, they tend to avoid taking initiative. Therefore, Indian workers frequently seek advice and direction from their superiors (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi 2005). The supervisor is expected to give orders rather than engaging in duties that are traditionally assigned to subordinates. Deviating from this customary practise may be perceived as unusual. The contrast between the accustomed power distance of the Austrian expatriates and the embedded power distance in the Indian culture, highlights the significance of understanding and adapting to diverse cultural norms, especially for multinational companies.

Power dynamics

The findings shed light on the different approaches adopted by the Austrian executives and managers in navigating power within the Indian working environment. Overall, the interviewees observed that the implementation of European practises in a foreign setting is not realistic and ineffective. To be successful, the one occupying the leading role must have not only the qualities of adaptability and flexibility, but also reasonable level of assertiveness. The findings from the conducted interviews provided insights on the contrasting perceptions of power dynamics between Austrian expatriates and their Indian co-workers. The Austrian expatriates demonstrated several techniques for handling the high power distance in the Indian working environment, by displaying several methods to address the cultural differences. Remarkably, some of the executives consciously changed their style of leadership, demonstrating an understanding for the Indian culture and adapted their approach by, for example, reducing the power distance. These supervisors strived to bridge the cultural gap and to lower their power distance by promoting open communication and promoting teamwork, thereby becoming more approachable to the co-workers. On the other hand, other managers and executives chose to entail the preservation of a significant power distance and the maintenance of interpersonal distance. Despite being in a different cultural setting, they consciously chose to preserve a certain level of hierarchical structure and to uphold a greater power distance to establish the traditional hierarchy that are common in Indian organisations. The Indian culture consists of several cultural and social aspects that might be employed to clarify the disparity observed in power distance when compared to Austrian society. What is the explanation for this difference?

On the one hand, many Indians in a subordinate position often seek for something what is called a “sneh-shradha relationship” (meaning in Hindi: faith, trust), where the subordinate demonstrates commitment and loyalty towards their senior, who is responsible for their welfare and attends to their needs. (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). This could be one explanation for the hierarchical seeking behaviour of Indian subordinates. Furthermore, the acceptance of hierarchical structures among the Indian society is influenced by their collectivist nature (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). They prioritise the group’s well-being over their own individual objectives, resulting in increased cohesiveness, group harmony and lastly more respect towards those in power.

On the other hand, the persistent power distance may be traced back to the British colonisation in India. The colonial history of India, under British rule, significantly influenced the country's power dynamics. The literature indicates that the British colonial administration established a hierarchical framework that categorised and stratified the population based on their status in society, commonly referred to as the caste system. (Amarjit Gill et al. 2010). The previously mentioned categorisation imposed additional impact on already existing social hierarchies and increased the disparity between various cultural groups, thereby leading to unequal power dynamics. Nevertheless, the imposition of the caste system was not the sole action enforced upon the Indian population. The imposition of British language and culture by colonial authorities in India resulted in conflicts and the exclusion of the Indian population, hence serving to uphold social inequalities. (Sushil Mittal & Gene Thursby, 2007). These actions and policies facilitated the establishment of a hierarchical structure and created a culture of respect towards authority, particularly towards the Western people. Terms like "Sir" were used by Indians to address English people, which was historically linked to notions of respect and has now become deeply ingrained within Indian culture. It is still used today in post-colonial periods, as seen in many situations that the interviewees have reported.

Business relationship

The nature of business relationships is deeply embedded in some cultures, and the success of an organisation can depend on its ability to adapt its members to different cultural settings (Andrew Molinsky, 2007). Of course, building a relationship holds equal importance in both Austria and India, however, the approach may manifest in different forms. Both countries have cultural differences in their perceptions and progression of long-term relationships. In India, the emphasis lies on collectivism and family ties, which often results in a more personal relationship. As seen in the theoretical chapter, family plays an important role in shaping an individual's life in India. Furthermore, in the business environment, one's family background is taken into consideration, as it influences decisions such as recruitment processes. Nonetheless, the Austrian approach might involve a more formal and structural approach, which does not entail a relationship beyond the workplace. Furthermore, the dynamics of the employer-employee relationship in India, when viewed from a Western perspective, show significant differences that may be perceived as morally questionable due to the presence of hierarchical subordination and interdependence. However, this form of interaction is part of the Indian working environment, as it is perceived that their superior ensures not only their

own security but also the security of their families. As a result, this inspires the employee to work hard and strive towards the company's objectives. It can also increase the likelihood of a positive impression which allows someone to fitting in, gaining popularity, and winning the respect, trust, and friendship from clients, colleagues, and subordinates while also sparking a positive spiral of interpersonal communication within a specific professional relationship, for example, between subordinate and superior (Andrew Molinsky 2007). Nonetheless, establishing such a relationship, or any relationship for that matter, can be perceived as complicated for Western expatriates due to their tendency to maintain a distinct line between their personal and professional lives. However, refraining from participating in such relationships in India could potentially result in the disappointment of Indian subordinates (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005).

4. Suggestions for future expatriates

This section provides recommendations for future Austrian expatriates who will have the opportunity to work in the Indian working environment. To be more precise, the following suggestions could help the expatriate managers or executives to navigate power effectively through a cultural setting that differs from theirs. Additionally, these tools can assist individuals in overcoming various cultural challenges. The given suggestions derive from literature review and findings gathered from conducted interviews.

Training

Prior to embarking on a journey to India, it is crucial to take into consideration the intercultural training, as it can offer numerous advantages in terms of ensuring a smoother transition and adapting to the culture (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005). Pre-departure training provided by the employing company is recommended to reduce pre-departure anxiety and to facilitate the expatriate's adaptation process. A researcher named Andrew Molinsky (2007) documented the importance of prioritising intercultural training that addresses the verbal and non-verbal communication styles, hierarchical structure, and social norms specific to the Indian environment. Providing future expats with essential knowledge and insights prior to their arrival in India will significantly improve their ability to adapt and to thrive in a multicultural workplace.

Learning the local language

Incorporating language courses into the pre-departure training should be included by the employing companies. As mentioned before, over 1000 languages are spoken across the country. However, learning some Hindi can be quite useful since it is the most widely spoken language in the country. Future expatriates should prioritise learning some catchphrases such as “Namaste”, for greetings and “Dhanyavaad” for expressing gratitude. Incorporating some basics of the local language shows a certain level of respect and politeness towards the host culture and their people. In addition, making an effort to engage with the locals in their language demonstrates a willingness to engage with the local culture. It might even help to gain a deeper understanding of the host society. Finally learning some Hindi might help overbridge unequal power dynamics between expatriates and local people. Language barriers lead to power distance, and which can be overcome by incorporating some useful catchphrases.

Patience

Patience is a crucial attribute that every future expatriate manager from Austria should have upon their arrival in India. The findings from the interviews indicate that the Indian work environment requires perseverance and resilience. As highlighted by Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi (2005), success in India demands a significant investment of time and energy due to the different work culture. It is likely that prospective expatriates will be confronted with the phenomenon known as “Indian Stretchable Time” (Rajesh Kumar & Anand Kumar Sethi, 2005), where meetings, for example, tend to start 5 to 10 minutes later than the scheduled time. In addition to that, one must have an understanding for different working methods. According to the observations made by Austrian expatriates, it appears that Austrian expats are too structured and too organized. Individuals seeking such attributes within an Indian organisation will search in vain. In India, there is a relatively more relaxed atmosphere in comparison to countries such as Austria, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries. Considerable patience is required, particularly during the phases of learning and implementing.

Adaptation

When contemplating a leadership position in a foreign country, it is imperative to adopt a proactive approach by setting clear goals and remaining patient. Nonetheless, an important suggestion for future expatriates in India is adaptation. Nowadays, organisations encounter a

significant difficulty in effectively navigating interconnected working environments to achieve optimal operational outcomes. Instead of operating only within their familiar cultural setting, individuals must nowadays be able to appropriately adapt in a variety of foreign cultural situations. (Andrew Molinsky, 2007). Adaptation helps to avoid uncomfortable situations which can have negative consequences for both the company and the expatriate himself.

Ms. G revealed in her interview her intention to implement certain structures from the Austrian headquarters to the Indian branch. She wanted to improve operational procedures in the organisation, but it was unsuccessful since it was impossible. Therefore, she adapted her ideas to align with the specific demands of the Indian working environment, resulting in a positive outcome. Mr. H is another expatriate who recommends being highly flexible and suggests that future expatriates should adjust to local customs rather than attempting to impose European work practises.

Open communication

Establishing trust in the workplace and actively engaging in communications are essential for future executives entering India. Some interviewees mentioned that the communication between the manager and the subordinate should be open and transparent. The emphasis lies in honesty and building trust. Thus, the implementation of an honest communication contributes to building a long-term partnership. Moreover, mutual trust results in working together more effectively and proactively address issues instead of concealing them. Building trust requires time. Nonetheless, certain expatriates have reported excellent outcomes after successfully cultivating trust with their staff. Consistent communication helped bridge the initial gap and created a solid foundation based on mutual understanding and trust. It is advised to remain composed when addressing problems and approach issues in a calm manner. The focus should lie in addressing and correcting the mistakes made by the employees without displaying intimidation. Even though the power distance might seem high in most cases, this position should not be exploited to exert authoritarian dominance over others. This strategy promotes a welcoming and comfortable environment for employees.

Build relationships

The insights derived from almost every conducted interviewee revealed how important it is to foster and nurture relationships in the Indian work environment. An important suggestion for future expatriates, based on the interviews, is to actively engage with Indian colleagues and

establish strong relationships. Each executive had their own approach or method to build a relationship. This involved various activities, such as dinners or getting a drink after work, engaging in informal conversations, and participating in religious activities such as group morning prayers. In India, these kinds of relationships are very important as they are beneficial for the company and its employees. Furthermore, it contributes to enhancing the overall welfare of the collective Indian society. As a result, the interviewees highlighted the improvements in teamwork and workflow after establishing a certain kind of relationship with their Indian co-workers. Getting to know them on a personal level became a major turning point for many interviewees in creating a positive working environment. To summarise, cultivating interpersonal connections with Indian colleagues is one of the secrets to success in the Indian business environment. This is especially important and beneficial for long term partnerships. Undoubtedly, business partnerships hold equal significance in both Austria and India, since fostering connections leads to more opportunities and new engagements. However, the approach is quite different. As seen in the literature review, Western people tend to draw a line between private and professional life. The process of developing relationships with Indians is characterised by an increased emphasis on human connections. Several interviewees revealed that sharing family details is an ordinary thing and a step to sustain a relationship. Failing to do so likely leads to the persistence of a high power distance.

Visit & learn about the country

Prior to visiting or even working in India it is advisable to study the Indian history and culture. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, some behavioural patterns like the high-power distance of Indians could be explained by their long colonial history. To address these concerns, a post-colonial perspective calls for critical examination and transformation of the underlying economic structures and practices. This includes efforts to dismantle racial biases, promote diversity and inclusion, and work towards more equitable economic systems that address historical injustices and promote social and economic justice for all individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. Furthermore, it is advised by several expatriate managers to visit the country prior to residing and acquaint oneself with the culture beforehand. In addition, it is advisable that future expatriates seek advice from individuals who have previously worked in India. Exchanging experiences with people who have prior experience of working or residing in India can provide valuable insights on the cultural challenges and power dynamics within the professional setting.

Following this guideline of suggestions could lead to a simpler adaptation into the new challenging environment. First and foremost, it is important that the expatriate must be happy and confident about their decision of embarking a professional career in India. It serves as a place where leaders can challenge and improve their abilities, with the goal to become more proficient in navigating power through a cross cultural environment.

5. Limitations and areas for further research:

Although, this study aimed to explore power relations of Austrian expatriate managers and executives in the Indian working environments, there are several limitations and areas for future research.

The first limitation to be found lies in the one-dimensional perspective. As a matter of fact, this study only analysed the perspective from the Austrian perspective. This one-dimensional approach ignores the viewpoint of Indian employees who work for these expatriates, which might limit the scope and depth of the findings. Only analysing the power dynamics from the Austrian expatriate point of view could lead into an incomplete image of the power relations in the Indian work environment.

Secondly, the study's focus on a specific sector in Austria, which is the mechanical engineering and automotive sector, is another limitation. The goal was to narrow down this research and only focus on an industry which is home to many Austrian businesses in India. Future research should investigate and compare power relations across several industries to obtain a more detailed understanding of power dynamics in the Indian business environment. It may reveal more cross-cultural power relations in India.

While the insights collected from the in depth-interviews provided valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge the limitation posed by the small sample size. This might limit the comprehension of the diverse experiences held by the many Austrian expatriates in India who are active in various industries. Future studies could address this limitation by expanding the sample size.

Another limitation I would like to address is Hofstede's study since there are controversies surrounding Hofstede's work, which need to be addressed when relying on his work as part of my thesis:

1. One of the most occurring critics is that his work is often criticised for essentialising and stereotyping different cultures. By reducing complex and diverse cultural groups into a few dimensions or indices, Hofstede's theory may oversimplify and reinforce cultural stereotypes. It can perpetuate the notion of fixed and homogeneous national cultures, disregarding internal diversity, subcultures, and individual variations within societies.
2. The absence of contextual understanding is another criticism. The reason behind that is that historical, political, economic, and social contexts that shape cultures are frequently ignored in Hofstede's theory. It concentrates on cultural values without giving enough thought to the historical developments, power dynamics, and social complexities that influence cultural behaviors and attitudes. This omission can lead to a limited understanding of the underlying reasons behind cultural differences.
3. A final critic is the lack of intersectionality. Hofstede's theory focuses on cultural differences along national lines and does not take social factors as gender, race, class, or religion into account. It ignores how these factors shape individuals' experiences, behaviours, and communication patterns. This may limit the theory's accuracy and applicability in diverse cultural contexts.

Even though the criticism that Hofstede's theory has faced, it is still regarded today as a well-known and relevant theory in the field of International Business. Furthermore, until today it is a framework which is often used to compare countries in the mentioned field of study. Using his cultural dimensions as a reference point can give a sense for a culture and some advice on the approaches which are to be taken. As mentioned, no culture is homogenous and there are differences in real life business environments and Hofstede's findings.

Lastly, the experiences and challenges faced by female expatriates in leading positions in a male dominated society like India represents a crucial area for future research. Furthermore, additional research on female expatriates in leading positions would be beneficial, given the fact that the tradition in Indian that men should hold positions of decision-making still prevails. Among the conducted interviews there was a female executive (Mrs. G) who led a production

site in India. She was placed in India by the CEO of her company and worked closely with an Indian male director. Her interview provided interesting viewpoints, which would be useful for future studies. Analysing and comparing the experiences of male and female expatriates in similar positions could provide findings of gender-specific challenges and suggestions for cultural adaptation. It could shed light on how gender influences leadership and power relations in the Indian business environment.

6. Conclusion

Today India gives the image of tradition and modernity. Social norms of the Indian subcontinent are still shaped by the country's traditions and hierarchical social structure like religion, caste, and gender. However, it is evident that the society is going through significant changes that demonstrate the departure from traditional practices. As seen, there are shifts in culture which shapes the new Indian society. As a result of globalisation and the rise of India as one of the fastest growing economies, the number of Western expatriates has increased in recent years. Nonetheless, navigating through its working environment requires an understanding of its culture, hierarchical structures, and power dynamics. That trend emphasises the need for more comprehensive research and gaining an understanding of expatriates in leading positions in the Indian working environment. As mentioned in the beginning, the purpose of this research was to explore the challenges and the experiences faced by Austrian expatriate executives and managers, specifically focusing on their power relations with Indian co-workers in the working environment. Moreover, the goal was to give potential suggestions to facilitate the accommodation to a new working environment and to promote the success of the business.

The preliminary theory focused on identifying the notion of power relations and leadership, as I wanted to focus on expatriates in executive and managerial positions. However, the focus of this research was first to identify and analyse the cultural challenges of the Indian society and especially when it came to power relations the working environment. Besides studying their behaviour in the working environment, I wanted to analyse the origin of the subordinate behavioural patterns which might have come from India's long colonial history according to several authors. Therefore, a part of the theory was dedicated to a post-colonial analysis. Finally, empirical research has been conducted by analysing the reflections of how Austrian expatriate executives and managers navigate power in the Indian working environment. The

findings revealed that the cultural differences, which were divided into key themes, are interrelated with the actual Indian working environment. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated the remaining power distance and the subordinate behaviour of Indian co-workers towards their respective Austrian leader. This resulted in formulating suggestions for future Austrian expatriate leaders. To summarise, they must emphasise the need for sensitivity, cultural awareness, and a recognition of historical legacies when engaging in cross-cultural communication and management. It requires an understanding of power dynamics, cultural hybridity, historical struggles, and the complexities of the colonial experience to be successful in the Indian working environment.

The findings of this study establish a foundation for future research, given the scarcity of literature on the power relations of Western expatriates in India. In addition to that this research will be useful for future Western companies to get a better insight of the challenging Indian working environment.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1

Semi-constructed interview:



Qualitative Study for Master Thesis:

Questionnaire for semi-constructed interview

I am conducting research on the topic with the following title: “A study of power relations in the working environment of Austrian expatriate executives & managers in India.”

Furthermore, I assure you that all information provided by your company will be kept confidential and will only be used for academic research purposes.

Introduction:

- Name:
- Occupation and your current role at the company:
- How long have you been working in India? How long did you work in India?

Working India:

- What was your motivation to go to India?
- Did you have any expectations before going to India, in terms of professional and cultural expectations?
- Were those expectations accurate?
- Could you name me some differences in the working environment between India and Austria?

Cultural challenges

- Do you remember the first challenges you faced at the company when you started working in India?
- How did the challenges evolve/change during your stay in India?
- How far do cultural factors impact a foreign company in India?
If yes, what could you name some of the cultural factors?
Any particular cultural behaviour, communication styles etc.?

Power dynamics

- From a leading point of view, is there a distinctive difference in defining power/expressing leadership between India and Austria?
(Decision making, authority, expertise)
- In your experience, what is the best way to express power/authority/leadership in a work environment in India?
- Were you ever in a position where you had to exercise power/authority to make a decision that challenged your ethical values? If yes, can you recall any (discrimination: gender, religion, caste, ethnicity, environmental concerns etc.)?

Power distance

- Could you tell me more about the power distance between you and the Indian co-workers?
- Can you recall any moment where you noticed a high or a low power distance between you and your fellow Indian co-workers?
For example, in the way they communicated or acted non-verbally?

- How was the communication (verbal & non-verbal language) style between you and your fellow Indian co-workers? For example, when you gave instructions.
- What was their reaction towards you when you praised them or when you criticized them?
- Over time, did you notice any change in power distance with the Indian stakeholders (employees, suppliers, managers, customers)? Was there a change or did it stay the same?
- Did you work with any other people of authority of Indian origin?

If yes:

- Were they superior to you? Equal? Subordinate?
- How was your relationship with the person/them?

Leadership styles

- In your opinion, what are some of the most important skills or qualities that expatriate managers need to have to navigate power effectively in general?
- What is your advice for future expatriates in leading positions going to India?

Thank you for your participation!

GERMAN VERSION:**Qualitative Studie für Master Thesis:****Fragebogen für halb-konstruiertes Interview**

- Ihr Name:

- Beruf und Ihre derzeitige Funktion im Unternehmen:

- Wie lange arbeiten Sie schon in Indien? Bzw. wie lange haben Sie in Indie gearbeitet?

Arbeiten in Indien :

- Was war Ihre Motivation, nach Indien zu gehen?

- Hatten Sie Erwartungen, bevor Sie nach Indien gingen, im Hinblick auf berufliche und kulturelle Erwartungen?

- Waren diese Erwartungen richtig?

- Können Sie mir einige Unterschiede in der Arbeitswelt zwischen Indien und Österreich nennen?

Kulturelle Herausforderungen

- Erinnern Sie sich an die ersten Herausforderungen, mit denen Sie in Ihrem Unternehmen konfrontiert wurden, als Sie in Indien zu arbeiten begonnen haben?

- Wie haben sich die Herausforderungen während Ihres Aufenthalts in Indien entwickelt/verändert?

Inwiefern wirken sich kulturelle Faktoren auf ein ausländisches Unternehmen in Indien aus? Wenn ja, welche? Gibt es bestimmte kulturelle Verhaltensweisen, Kommunikationsstile, die beachtet werden müssen?

Macht-Dynamik

- Gibt es aus Sicht der Führungskraft einen markanten Unterschied in der Definition von Macht/im Ausdrücken von Leadership zwischen Indien und Österreich?
(Entscheidung, Autorität, Expertise)

- Was ist Ihrer Erfahrung nach der beste Weg, um Macht/Autorität/Führung in einem Arbeitsumfeld in Indien auszudrücken?

- Waren Sie jemals in einer Position, in der Sie Macht/Autorität ausüben mussten, um eine Entscheidung zu treffen, die Ihre ethischen Werte in Frage stellte? Wenn ja, können Sie sich an solche Situationen erinnern (Diskriminierung : Geschlecht, Religion, sexuelle Belästigung, Korruption, Umweltbezogene Anliegen?)

Machtdistanz

- Können Sie mir mehr über die Machtdistanz zwischen Ihnen und den indischen Mitarbeitern erzählen?

- Können Sie sich an einen Moment erinnern, in dem Sie eine hohe oder niedrige Machtdistanz zwischen Ihnen und Ihren indischen Mitarbeitern festgestellt haben?
Zum Beispiel in der Art und Weise, wie sie kommunizierten oder sich nonverbal verhielten?

- Wie war der Kommunikationsstil (verbale und nonverbale Sprache) zwischen Ihnen und Ihren indischen Arbeitskollegen? Zum Beispiel, wenn Sie Anweisungen gegeben haben.

- Wie reagierten sie auf Sie, wenn Sie sie lobten oder wenn Sie sie kritisierten?

- Haben Sie im Laufe der Zeit eine Veränderung der Machtdistanz zu den Beteiligten (Mitarbeiter, Lieferanten, Manager, Kunden) festgestellt? Hat es eine Veränderung gegeben oder ist sie gleich geblieben?

- Haben Sie mit anderen Führungskräften zusammengearbeitet?

Wenn ja:

- Waren sie Ihnen übergeordnet? Gleichberechtigt? Untergebene?

- Wie war Ihre Beziehung zu der/den Person(en)?

Leadership

- Was sind Ihrer Meinung nach einige der wichtigsten Fähigkeiten oder Qualitäten, die Manager im Ausland haben müssen, um die Macht im Allgemeinen effektiv zu nutzen?

- Was raten Sie zukünftigen Führungskräften, die nach Indien gehen?