1 Introduction

1.1. Relevance of research

"For every complex problem there is a simple solution. And it is always wrong"  
(H.L. Menken, American journalist, as quoted by Lane, Maznevski, & Mendenhall, 2004: 23)

Going back in history shows that teamwork has existed since the dawn of time. Teams composed of many members with complementary skills in order to be most effective were already implemented by primitive man for hunting and gathering (Erny, 1987; Desjeux, 1987; Guigo, 1994 as quoted by Mutabazi & Derr, 2003: 2).

Today, due to globalization and European integration multinational teams are increasingly gaining in importance and are becoming widespread. In international public organizations like the European Commission and the European Parliament people from 25 European nations are working together. In multinational companies people from all over the world are mixed to fulfil a task.

Regarding the different cultural and individual backgrounds of individuals in multinational teams, it is no longer a secret that cultural as well as organizational features are important factors which drive multinational teams. However, the understanding of the complexity inherent in multinational teams is not always easy to handle, and a false understanding and interpretation of the multiple categories (e.g. cultural values and norms, organizational context, interests, perceptions, personality) influencing multinational team performance reduces the success of those teams.

Although there is a substantial body of literature addressing selected issues of multinational teams previous research reports divergent results on the effects of cultural diversity on team outputs. While some researchers found positive effects of diversity and, therefore, dwell on the ‘value in diversity’ hypothesis (Richard, 2000: 165) others mainly found negative effects. Researchers from numerous disciplines, most importantly psychologists, culture specialists and management scholars, pull in several directions to analyze multinational teams. Across the field a broad range of categories was identified, which have an influence on specific aspects of team performance. Results differ widely depending on the selection of those explanatory variables and on the perception of ‘team performance’ or ‘team output’. Particularly, recent research focuses on selected categories of influence on team performance, more or less ignoring the complex relations that might exist between the categories.

Consequently, the purpose of this dissertation is first to attempt to clarify the influence of the various categories on multinational team performance and their
interrelations. Additionally, it aims to convey a new understanding of the relevance of the complexity inherent in multinational teams.

Regarding the history of the European Union and its institutions the number of employees with different cultural backgrounds has increased with each enlargement process of the European Union. The ongoing increase in employees from different cultural backgrounds allows the European Commission and the European Parliament to be an interesting research object to investigate the research question “What does really matter in multinational teams?” Due to the high degree of multinationality it was decided to analyse the complexity inherent in working in a multinational team (particularly in contrast to working in a domestic team) in the context of these both institutions from an Austrian perspective.

Additionally, this decision was supported by the interest of studying the basic question of how multinational teams work in a bureaucratic organization. This contribution is highly valuable, as so far only rudimentary empirical research was undertaken in the field of multinational teams in international public organisations.

The result of this dissertation is an intensive analysis of the requirements of multinational teams concerning the influence of the complex relations of societal (i.e. culture), organizational and individual categories on team work. Linking these categories allows us to identify how individuals in multinational teams in a specific context deal with the inherent complexity in order to improve their performance.

1.2. Research process

To deal with the complexity inherent in this research topic the research process was organized as follows.

Desk research - Theory Building

The first research objective was to gain understanding of the various categories influencing team performance in the literature. In order to integrate this dissertation into the international field of multinational team research an intensive literature analysis of leading (international) academic journals was undertaken.

Desk research has allowed to develop a research concept and theoretical framework to study the complexity of multinational team performance. Literature of various academic streams (e.g. international management, psychology, sociology, organizational behavior) was reviewed.

Field research - Empirical Analysis

The empirical analysis of the data was based on the theoretical framework. The second research objective was to show what categories are to be seen as important for team performance by multinational team members. The final goal is to present the complex relations among these categories. Empirical analysis will show how
multinational team members cope with the complexity inherent in multinational team work. In the context of the European Commission and the European Parliament multinational teams are defined as groups of individuals from different nations that seek to make sense of various work-related events (Smith & Peterson, 1988). ‘Event’ can be defined as “a partially abstracted bit of social reality that serves as a unit of information processing, interpretation, or meaning constructed by a social actor in interaction with other social actors” (Peterson, 1993: 7). ‘Work related’ implies that there is pressure for achievement. A work team has to perform within a limited time span, i.e. to deliver results which are important to the team itself and/or the organization.

The aim of this study is to study social patterns of behaviour of multinational team members to figure out how they are influenced by e.g. organizational settings and how in turn they influence multinational team performance. This study highlights the development of theory in close context to “multinational team reality”. In his presentation at the Academy of Management meeting 2004 (New Orleans, Louisiana, Session 476: The great applied theorists, Monday, 10:40am-12:00am), Jay Lorsch, one of the most famous researchers in organizational behaviour, pointed out: “If you want to learn about the organization, you have to learn from real people”. Thus, if you want to learn about multinational teams you have to ask real team members.

This approach goes beyond quantitative research methodology. Consequently, qualitative research was found to be the appropriate research methodology. Qualitative data were analyzed in a way that allows for the generation of propositions. Empirical data were collected with in-depth narrative interviews. 25 interviews were conducted with Austrian employees in the European Commission. 15 interviews were conducted with Austrian members of the European Parliament. The experiences and knowledge of the interview partners in multinational team work are an important source to figure out what influences multinational team performance. Therefore, the findings based on their experiences can be used to close gaps in the literature and to study in detail the complex relations of various categories of influence on team performance.

Narrative interviews are biased by individual attributes and personal perspectives of the interview partners as well as of the interviewer. However, the appropriate use of research methodology (i.e. a professional, well prepared interview process and an accurate data analysis) helps to overcome disadvantages of the qualitative research approach.

Results - Managerial implications and implications for future research

The findings of desk and field research help to develop an integrated model of team performance which considers the complexity of the research topic. Both, the theoretical foundation and the empirical analysis of data, which reflect the reality of working in a multinational team, support the drawing of conclusions and the
development of propositions. It suggests topics for future multinational team research and gives managerial implications for the efficient use of multinational teams.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

This study is structured as follows (for illustration see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The structure of the dissertation**

![Diagram of dissertation structure](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Source: The author

After this brief introduction, the theoretical framework for this study will be developed based on an intensive literature analysis. It begins with a brief overview of existing studies on intercultural management. Three major strands in cross-cultural literature can be identified: general cultural values, culture shock/cultural adjustment concepts based on personality traits and cultural standard methods. These major strands in literature can be loosely related to the Parsons & Shils (1962) concept of interrelated values, personality and action.

In a next step, literature focusing on multinational team performance was analyzed, including all of the three strands of literature mentioned above. According to the literature analysis, the following variables can be selected which explain influences of multinationality on team work: society, organization, individual, team and moderators. In a last step, these categories that affect multinational team performance are arranged into an integrated model. The analysis of the literature leads to the following three research aspects:

- Which categories influence the performance of multinational teams?
- Are these categories related? If yes, how are they related?
- How do individuals cope with the complexity of working in multinational teams?
Chapter 3 deals with the methodology used in this study. In a first step, methodologies in empirical social research (quantitative versus qualitative) were compared in order to identify the appropriate research tool. Then the techniques used to develop propositions are explained in detail: The narrative interview was used to collect empirical data. The collected data were analyzed according to the qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2003). Finally, this chapter discusses how reliability and validity of data can be ensured in qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the empirical analysis for the European Commission and the European Parliament. Each identified category of influence on team performance is presented in detail. The summary of the chapter allows the developing of propositions and presents the complex relations of the identified categories.

The study concludes with summarizing the results of the empirical parts. It offers managerial implications of how to deal with the inherent complexity in multinational teams as well as implications for future research.