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**Abstract**

The accelerated globalization of businesses has resulted in the increased intercultural interaction in all the levels of organizations. Businesses are expected to deal routinely and successfully with the colleagues, suppliers, authorities, customers and other business partners from all over the world. The research and literature in the cross-cultural management has concentrated on the provision of models of cultural values and behaviours, strategic international human resources management and especially in expatriate management including preparation, training effectiveness and more recently repatriation. The intercultural communication and negotiation has also received attention from scholars in linguistics, social and personal psychology as well business management.

The objective of thesis is to describe possible ways of acquiring intercultural competence and whether the competence is acquired in a planned or random manner by organizations in Finland. The thesis concentrates on the acquisition of intercultural competence beyond long-term assignments abroad. The theoretical discussion provides definitions of culture, cultural value variables found in all cultures and intercultural competence in the scope of this thesis. The intercultural competence is considered in this thesis as a term describing the ability to work across cultures through an instilled knowledge and understanding of cultures on a general level in terms of communication and working styles.

The acquisition of intercultural competence is divided into external and internal sections considering the most common venues of obtaining knowledge into businesses. The external chapter discusses the consideration of intercultural competence in recruitment, the use of external consultants and inter-organizational cooperation. The internal acquisition chapter attempts to describe intercultural learning based on the previous theoretical frameworks used in the conjunction of inter- and cross-cultural training. The formal off-the job and informal on-the job opportunities to develop intercultural competence in companies are also discussed. The empirical part of the study was conducted in three case companies with the focused interview tactic. Interviewees were HR professionals from selected Finnish companies running different types of international operations. The empirical data supported the adapted model of intercultural competence; consisting of cognitive, affective and communicative behavioural dimensions. The need for intercultural competence was recognized in practice, when faced with a problematic or new situation requiring a non-existent skill or ability. The acquisition of intercultural competence was mainly intentional, when sought for externally; whereas internal development of intercultural competence relied heavily on employees' initiative although some training was provided by the companies.

Key words	Intercultural competence; competence acquisition; intercultural learning
Further information	