Interview transcript Interviewee I -C

C runs a bit late. We introduce each other on first name basis in Danish. He is a bit in a hurry, just came from a meeting and has another meeting to go to. He tells me about what he knows this interview is about. This is very precise. I tell him about the background of this interview anyhow including its confidentiality.

His area of responsibility is finance, financial reporting, costs, sales and analysis of this on group level and communicating these to the local entities. He tries to understand what the local entities mean by their reports and communicates these findings to managers and then on to Danaher.

Q: [5:56] so, if you say local entities you mean like uhm all your subsidiaries you have? [ja] [ja] That’s quite a lot of countries [ja].

A: I also have in my team the responsibility of preparing all financial reporting for the European entities [hmhm]. So, for Europe we have made a chat-service [hmhm] function here in Denmark [hmhm] for all the European entities. So, they have .. next to know financial recourses [hmhm] and that goes both for the production and sales entities [ja] with the Polish entity as the only exception [hmhm] [so far] Nja, it’s newly acquired and we don’t want to move tasks from a cheap labor area to a very expensive labor area [ja] so uhm that’s the reason why.

Q: When you say like you’re in contact with these entities is this mostly by ..ja by Internet, by videoconferences, by phone, in person?

A: It’s all it’s all sorts. It’s Email it’s general information, [hmhm] it’s one on one telephone conferences, it’s uhm physical meetings on conferences or going out visiting them [Okay] So, it’s all that.

[Not transcribed: 07:21 – 07:26]

Q: Concerning these meetings or encounters, let’s put it like that, uhm what do you find most challenging?

A: Well, the challenging is, I find, is being a new person. [hmhm] Radiometer is a very old company, [ja] people tend to have been here for numerous of years [hmhm], uhm so, you’re a newcomer [hmhm] which has no relations to some of the people. Sometimes it’s the first time that you uhm going to act with them. [ja] So, you need to build a relation before you can have a good communication. [hmhm] And that goes whether they are Danish or whether they are Japanese [ja] or whatever kind of cultural background they have [yes]. So, that’s of course the first thing, that you need to have uhm a relation with people [hmhm], especially we are a very American company [hmhm], so we are very focused on the financial performance of of [ja] people, and so, when you talk about their financial performance, you’re actually talking about their personal performance [ja]. So, that you need to keep into consideration as well. And if [hmhm] you don’t have any relations it it [hmhm] you need to to [ja] do the communication the right way until you have sort of. The best thing is to have a beer here and there and then you can probably keep barriers down. [ja]. But again, there is no real cultural [hmhm] thing about that. That I think is very generic across cultures. [hmhm] Of course, Japanese people you need to .. have all the how do you say [deep exhale] all the furnish .. all the uhm nice expressions and uhm [ja, all this politeness around before you can actually] Ja, some of that but it’s also that you need to know your role before you say anything to them [hmhm], but it’s not something which really is a … it’s not something you keep sort of in your forehead.

[09:24 – 10:05: I ask him if he gets some information about the people he meets beforehand. He says that it’s again the way that this is an old company and everybody knows everybody, because everybody has been at Radiometer for a long time, and newcomers don’t have that luxury. So they are just thrown into swim.]

Q: What would you say, like in your experience, which kinds of skills are asked of you in these situations like ja go out there and swim?

A: Ja uhm what kind of experiences, ja well that is experience in between with handling people in [hmhm] in in in these situations [hmhm]. Uhm [4 sec silence]

Q: Are there certain skills or strategies you apply?

A: Ja, definitely. I mean it’s good relation before you actually express your real opinion [hmhm] about financial reporting [hmhm] especially. [hmhm] And focus on factual stuff [hmhm], so, I mean we are 10 million on outbound if we miss 5 million [ja], so keep it in very uhm objective terms [ja] [ja]. So you don’t get any emotional, whether they have screwed up, or whether they could have been better [hmhm] or anything like that [ja]. So, as long as you have any relation here, keep it very objective. [ja] And very focused, explaining why you’re asking. [hmhm] so, there’s sort of a reason behind and making it objective so that they kind of not get emotional about stuff. [hmhm]

[11:22-12:29: not transcribed]

Q: In general how do you feel about engaging with people that are different from you?

A: No problem.

Q: Let’s put it like this: Did you take this job, because you have to have that much interaction?

A: Ja. [ja] along with other things [ja]. But ja, I’ve been in international companies like Radiometer for 15 years and it’s part of my skill-base [hmhm] and which I want to utilize going forward. [hmhm] Yes, that’s the reason why [hmhm] and uhm sort of these uhm intercultural thing … I I [deep exhale] I tend to [?] have my own theory, that [hmhm] ja, people from the Asian-Pacific Area they have a lot of these you need to have a status before you can [hmhm] talk to them, also for German people especially if you’re acting in the southern part of Germany [hmhm] but, … ja sort of just a median you know [hmhm] people are like this [using his hands to describe the Bell-curve] and these are this and these are formal and you can read all sorts of reports about how people are in[hmhm] what culture and how acting used to be [hmhm] and then I always say: well the standard deviation of people [Q: slight laugh] is broader than the actual deviation between cultures. [ja] So, ja you can say this is a Japanese man [ja] you need to have this politeness and blablabla. But, don’t put him into a narrow box [hmhm], because he can be just as different [ja] like Danes can be. [hmhm] Uhm from from [hmhm] whatever small box [hmhm] you could have meant. And observe that [hmhm], and that’s what I mean, build the relation, get an understanding [hmhm] how is this guy and what is he thinking or a girl for that matter [ja], and get an understanding of that [ja], more than trying to say: He’s an American, he will just talk like I don’t know what and have this perception of the world and [ja] blablabla. [ja] so, uhm this is something which which I have .. had learnt for many years, that ja [hmhm] don’t put people into this cultural box [ja], but still have in the back of your head that uhm especially as a Dane where we don’t have all these uhm formal [Q laughing] gestures and formal stuff, but I mean [ja] you can go down 500 kilometers south into Germany and if you .. if you really you know, classical the door is shut for a boss and that’s the way in Germany and they perceive it as opportunity [hmhm] because what is behind a closed door is an opportunity and we perceive it as an obstacle [hmhm]. These sorts of things you know so that you don’t get misunderstood by that. [hmhm]. But but sort of beside of that [hmhm], no I don’t think that you really focus on that. Focus on getting to understand the people, that’s much more important. [hmhm] And if you had some written biography of all the people, you really wouldn’t know. [ja] [ja] Your perception of putting people into this box, which I say you shouldn’t, [ja] would probably go even higher. [hmhm].

Q: Since you now mention this putting into a box or .. ja, actually that people are more or less alike, are there any things that tip you of when you meet somebody that this person is from a different culture?

A: [5 sec silence] Jo, everybody is, I mean. There’s a lot of countries, so whenever you go abroad you meet tons of people coming from [hmhm] tons of of [ja] …. And as I said you have all the clichés about different cultures [ja] and uhm and uhm then I ask, I’m always trying to tell: Okay, we know they are like that, but this one could be different. [hmhm] So, it’s always to to good or bad [ja] to stay and to find out how is this person. [Yes] So, ja, this is sort of the openness in in getting to know the people [hmhm] and build the relation [ja]. And sometimes you sort of get confirmed about all your classic clichés and and sometimes you get surprised. [ja] [ja].

Q: So actually as I understand you would think that the time spent face-to-face [yes] is actually worth while [ja, ja] because then you have a [ja, ja] [definitely]

A: Definitely [ja]. If you don’t have this … it could be it could be 10 minutes [hmhm] I mean that could mean the world [hmhm] Uhm [ja] just to say hello, to put a face on people, they have got a face on you, so it’s not just some strange [hmhm] voice in the telephone or some [ja] letters in an Email, uhm that really helps. [ja] And you, especially in an organization like this which is very American, very global focused uhm [hmhm] people tend to have that global perception within, so when you meet with them [hmhm] they are relatively open [hmhm] in terms of getting their message across.

[17:42-21:13: I ask if he considers all departments to be open minded. He answers it’s mainly the departments that have a lot of contact, such as marketing, finance, sales. So, they are most likely more open-minded as production in Ballerup. Moreover, he argues that the workforce isn’t that diverse and especially in production there are hardly any none-Danes. But he mentions the newly bought Polish production site which “created some turmoil” as jobs were moved from a high cost to a low cost region. On the other hand he says that Radiometer does not save that much money due to this decision because]

A: Saving on R&D has much more impact than saving on production.

[21:18-26:57: We talk a bit more about the “turmoil” due to moving production to Poland. In his view it’s been very important to create transparency in order for the employees to understand this management decision and to ensure that rumors won’t be spread. Moreover, the unions played an important part. What more, the Polish people have the same education and the country is not underdeveloped as some people may think and labor costs are down to a fifth in comparison to Denmark. He goes on telling that the unions have a very strong stance at Radiometer, which is why it hasn’t been easy to move parts of the production to Poland. Moreover, he points out that Polish culture differs quite a lot to Danish culture because of the influence of the Catholic Church and the socialist history. Here he says that it is always a plus to know important stages of a countries history. The “glorious days” of a country’s history he would use to have small-talk with before engaging in business talk]

A: […] but being able to do easy communication [hmhm], that’s uhm that’s the target. [ja] We’re not here for uhm further involving some kind of culture but to do business [hmhm] [hmhm].

Q: So, you kind of try to meet in the middle somewhere …

A: Ah .. I wouldn’t call it meeting, it’s sort of like [hmhm] you need to have mutual respect [hmhm], and if you know people and you know how they are and you treat them so they feel comfortable then, I don’t know, whether it’s me who’s moving or them whose moving [hmhm] and frank, actually I don’t care [ja] just as long as I get my points through. [ja] [yes] That’s the most important thing [yes] and I don’t need to spend excessive [hmhm] amount of time [ja]. I mean, to write you know peoples last name, mister, doctor I mean [ja] if it’s that what it takes then it’s what it takes, it’s no problem. [ja]

[27:55- 29:36: He furthermore says that if he has to go through a lot of people just to talk to one specific person he will consider that a waste of time. He talks about the Danaher culture which in his eyes wants a very homogenous culture which is very profit oriented and easy to do business with. Therefore they don’t job against a lot of local cultures but they don’t go in for saying we want to be extremely colorful. So, they are just having internal audit in Asia Pacific in a location in China, which according to Interviewee C cause “a battle” when Chinese have to work together with Japanese.]

A: So, so, I mean and I think there is some thinking behind that, saying that, ja we should be able to to work together with all different cultures regardless with what historical background there has been between the countries [yes] [telephone ringing for the 3rd time, but Interviewee C’s not taking it.]

Q: Uhm have you had kind of like meetings or encounters with people where you learned a lot about yourself, your way of being? Which you weren’t aware of before perhaps?

A: Sort like an aha-experience? [hm] No. [okay] .. But along the way: ja. [you mean small] Ja, ja,, ja, find out that there is sort of a Danish culture or the Scandinavian culture which is actually funny in itself when you meet all this typically intercultural uhm that Scandinavia is sort of a situation in itself, we’re 15 million and when you ..opposite to Chinese which is one billion people [ja] so they’re not that homogenous, so so but never mind. [Q and A laughing] uhm So you find out little by little that we are very, we Danish culture is very easy to communicate with as long as you don’t get personal related but business related [hmhm]. Uhm and and that this easy communication [hmhm] you can’t bring everywhere without you getting the relation up and running initially. So. [ja] that’s probably the biggest lesson learnt that you need to take this time and you cannot just pick up the phone as a newcomer and call somebody in uhm [deep exhale] Thailand or wherever you know and starting to ask him the same questions as if you have been here for 20 years and you know each other from the last 15. [ja] [ja] this relationship building this networking, this understanding how the organizations work [hmhm], that’s both from foreign studies and reading and experience [hmhm], so little by little [hmhm] no, no major events.

[32:09- 32:48: I ask if he changed his own way of being by incorporating a bit from other cultures. He says no. I tell him that I have the feeling that I’ve become a bit more Danish if one can say that.]

A: But if you’re working in a Danish international [hmhm] company [hmhm], it’s not like you’re working for a French company, because you know they say we need to enforce our culture with everybody because we are French now [hmhm] and everybody needs to think our way. I think many Danish corporations they all will probably have a a a uhm group culture which we like to enforce [hmhm] but but it’s not something that is rooted in anything Danish [ja]. So, they’re very flexible, they’re very open, [hmhm] they’re very sort of like, we don’t you need to think like in our way which is sort of based in our culture, you need to very uhm [deep exhale] [hmhm] ja diverse in the way that [hmhm] you actually can communicate with a lot of people [hmhm]. So I don’t think that that [hmhm] that you [?33:41 by] or bringing anything in, you are just flexible [hmhm]. That’s sort of good, probably the right word. [ja]

[33:49- 34:09] I ask him if there are different group cultures within Radiometer Denmark. He says he cannot answer that question because he has not been here long enough to know.]

A: Of course there’s different cultures between each functions, it’s probably more diversity of that [hmhm] then between any countries [hmhm] [hmhm].

[34:20- 37:02: We talk about the rules they have to comply to, local, US-regulations and so on and how to prioritize them.]

Q: If you look at Radiometer as a whole, […] which role does culture play at Radiometer?

A: I don’t know how it was in the past, but I mean that Danaher culture is something that is very very much alive, very much focused on [hmhm], very much .. this is the right way this is ..ja very much sort of implies what is the wrong way [hmhm].There is a lot of that. In Danaher we think that, in Danaher we should do [hmhm], according to Danaher this is the way [hmhm] so there’s a lot of [hmhm] Danaher tools, Danaher thinking, Danaher compliance that is pulled into [hmhm] the system and that’s a lot of you know: Kaizen is the way of living or of our life. [hmhm] But you also have 11 uhm ..managerial roles […]

[38:00 – 42:54: He talks about the Danaher business system and all the courses they had to take in order to learn the Danaher culture. Within these courses there is also a assessment of yourself and the managers you know. He calls this “some sort of brainwash” and especially finance and HR live by these rules. And it’s only a bit Radiometer culture left, in his opinion. Than we talk about Kaizen: to do things better, better financial performance. Concerning the connection of Danaher culture to cultural diversity in general he says]

A: I think it’s an very American cultural thing you know [hmhm] where you .. you need to have you need to be part of the community [hmhm] but you can be very much yourself [hmhm] [ja] but you need to act within the frame of the community [ja] but then you can do whatever you like [hmhm] and how you [hmhm] how you do your own thinking [hmhm] where it’s sort of like ja many other cultural thinking is sort of like if you want to be living in France you need to French, talk the language, think the way all uhm … [hmhm] all the stuff there. [hmhm] I think it’s sort of the very American way of embracing every culture but we have some … [certain] ja some certain base [ja] that uhm trusting the constitution [Q starts to laugh] and all that stuff. You need to believe in this, but how you do it is very much up to yourself. [hmhm].

[43:51- 44:54: In this sense, the way of improving output is different from company to company, meaning that the Danaher culture is expressed very differently from company to company, but the tools used are the same.]

[44:54- end: I ask if people in his opinion would need some more input in order to find out what the culture in Radiometer is like. He thinks the courses offered so far are good enough. In this context he mentions that some courses concerning the Danaher culture are like brain-washing and one might fear that they “take away one’s identity” like at McDonalds. I thank him for his help and ask him if I may contact him, in case things should come up.]