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## TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION IN GLOBAL VIRTUAL TEAMS: TEAM LANGUAGE AND TEAM CULTURE<sup>1</sup>

Experts dealing with project management opine that project team members spend the majority of their time communicating with one another. Effective communication, therefore, is a decisive factor for project success. This paper looks at the aspects of communication in project teams formed in global corporations. It begins with an outline of global project management. It goes on to discuss selected aspects of specialist communication in general and communication in global project teams in particular. Special attention is paid to linguistic ('team language') and cultural ('team culture') aspects of global project teams, which are considered fundamental for the existence of and collaboration in global project teams. The article finishes with a conclusion and an outlook towards future research on project management.

Over the past few decades, as more and more projects have been delivered and a growing number of people have become involved in projects, project management has become an especially attractive form through which to conduct business activity worldwide. In fact, project management exists internationally as an established and recognised profession, with commonly defined processes, methods (methodologies) and standards<sup>2</sup> to apply, professional institutions<sup>3</sup> to

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge), PRINCE 2 (PROjects IN Controlled Environments).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. International Project Management Association (IPMA), Project Management Institute (PMI).

belong to, certifications<sup>4</sup> to obtain, and education and training programmes to undertake. Moreover, the emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) has enabled specialists to collaborate virtually, i.e. with the lack of direct person-to-person contact, and hence has led to the development of global project management. Numerous projects are now carried out by specialists who are geographically dispersed, have different mother tongues and represent a variety of cultures. As a result, companies all over the world not only need to deal with organisational challenges but also have to sort out communication issues. In this paper, I attempt to explicate the rudiments of communication in global virtual teams, in particular ‘team language’ and ‘team culture’. In order to take a systematic approach to communication in global project management, I first present definitions of the basic terms related to project management and global virtual teams, and subsequently provide an overview of the main linguistic issues. I finish the article with a conclusion and an outlook to future research in the area of specialist communication in global virtual teams.

## 1. GLOBAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT BASICS

Before explaining the key definitions relating to (global) project management, I would like to point out that the definitions of the main terms are not fixed or unanimously agreed on by experts in the field. For the purpose of this paper, I adopt the definitions presented in the PMBOK Guide (A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, 2008), which is widely regarded, internationally, as a standard for professionals dealing with project management. I also draw on definitions by other experts where I consider the explanations in the PMBOK Guide to be incomplete or misleading.

### 1.1. PROJECT AND PROJECT LIFE CYCLE

I begin with the definition of ‘project’, which is the core term in project management. According to the PMBOK Guide,

A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. (PMBOK Guide 2008: 5)

It is worth devoting particular attention to two adjectives mentioned in the definition of the term ‘project’, i.e. (A) ‘temporary’ and (B) ‘unique’. (A) Projects

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<sup>4</sup> Project Management Professional (PMP) is one of the most famous credentials offered worldwide by PMI.

are characterised as ‘temporary’ because they start at a defined point in time and end at a specific point in time. The end of a project is reached when the outcome agreed at the beginning is achieved. It is worth noting that the word ‘temporary’ does not necessarily mean short in duration, nor does it usually apply to the product, service, or result (*ibid.*). (B) Typically, every project creates a unique outcome. R. Newton (2009: 11) claims that ‘when the outcome is delivered, something will have changed’, and the project ceases to be necessary. Uniqueness may also refer to the project work (PMBOK Guide 2008: 5): In order to carry out a project, a specific one-off set of activities needs to be undertaken. This distinguishes projects performed in a given company from the day-to-day business run by that company.

Although each project is unique, there are several characteristics widely accepted as common features of projects. In principle, all projects are undertaken so that a concrete goal may be reached. Projects are complex and interdisciplinary. Most projects consist of at least three stages (the so-called phases), and these are carried out by employees representing different departments within one company. The scope, time, cost and quality of projects are defined in advance. Projects are generally expected to be delivered well, at low cost and quickly. As opposed to other activities carried out in companies on a regular basis, projects are inherently risky, i.e. their achievement is often far from certain. Hence, projects are regarded as more difficult to execute than other, everyday operational tasks (M. Trocki, B. Grucza, K. Ogonek 2009: 17–18).

In addition, projects are closely tied to a ‘project life cycle’ which can be defined as a model describing how to deliver a given project in a specific period of time (*ibid.* p. 29). Certain tasks must be undertaken at defined points in time, which are related to ‘project phases’:

A project life cycle is a collection of generally sequential and sometimes overlapping project phases whose name and number are determined by the management and control needs of the organization or organizations involved in the project, the nature of the project itself, and its area of application. . . . The project life cycle can be determined and shaped by the unique aspects of the organization, industry or technology employed. While every project has a definite start and a definite end, the specific deliverables and activities that take place in between will vary widely with the project. The life cycle provides the basic framework for managing the project, regardless of the specific work involved. (PMBOK Guide 2008: 15)

In general, the project life cycle consists of four phases: 1) starting (initiating) the project, 2) organising and preparing (planning), 3) carrying out (executing) the project work, 4) closing the project. However, according to the definition of the ‘project life cycle’, the names and numbers of phases are not always defined in advance, but depend on ‘the nature of the specific project and the style of the project team or organization’ (PMBOK Guide 2008: 19). Taking into account the various fields/lines of business in which projects are carried out, it may also be concluded that it is impossible to define one ideal structure for all projects

(J. Haffer 2009: 20 ff). However, some companies set rules and principles outlining how to execute projects in order to make project management more efficient and easier for project team members. These rules and principles are regularly monitored, verified and updated, and there is usually a note attached to them saying that all projects need to be treated individually:

This does not mean that the knowledge, skills, and processes described should always be applied uniformly on all projects. For any given project, the project manager, in collaboration with the project team, is always responsible for determining which processes are appropriate, and the appropriate degree of rigor for each process. (PMBOK Guide 2008: 38)

In other words: There is no single way to handle each and every project. That is why it is of the utmost importance for project managers to tailor the process of project management to the given project, client, business needs etc.

In the quotation above, two more terms appear which are regarded as fundamental in project management: ‘project team’ and ‘project manager’. I discuss the meaning of these terms in Section 1.2.

## 1.2. PROJECT TEAM AND PROJECT MANAGER

A project team is designed to deliver a given project, and it is disbanded at a fixed time, when the project is finished. A project team consists of project members, characterised by specialist knowledge and skills, led by a project manager who is responsible for the project. The lists of ‘characteristics and skills’ of project team members, especially of the project manager, are lengthy. However, it should be emphasised that the project manager is not expected to be an expert in every field. It is sufficient that other project team members are specialists in the given field(s), and that the project manager has the necessary skills to communicate with them and to organise communication processes within the project team (see M. Pawlak 2006: 207).

I would like to stress that in the globalisation age, when companies extend their influence beyond national borders (the so-called ‘global corporations’, ‘transnational corporations’, ‘multinational corporations’, ‘multinationals’), employees work together to undertake ‘global projects’ (D. I. Cleland, R. Gareis 2006). This means that project team members are located in various places in the world, and they work in different time zones. They also have different mother tongues and represent various national/ethnic cultures (‘global virtual teams’, see Section 3). Global projects tie in with ‘global project management’ (D. I. Cleland, R. Gareis 2006, Global Project Management: online), which I discuss in more detail in Section 1.3.

### 1.3. GLOBAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

‘Global project management’ can be defined on the basis of the definition of the term ‘project management’, the difference being that global project management takes place in an international environment in which boundaries of geography and time become bridgeable or might even disappear entirely. In this Section, I examine the basic issues related to (global) project management. In the PMBOK Guide, the following question is posed: ‘What is project management?’ There is also an answer given: ‘Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.’ (PMBOK Guide 2008: 6). ‘Project requirements’ (and expectations) are usually determined by stakeholders or clients, and should be met by the project team working on a given project, whereas ‘knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques’ refer to the specialist knowledge and competencies of project team members. Due to the fact that these terms are not defined unanimously by experts in project management, I will not elaborate on them in this paper. Instead, I present the concept of project management in the form of a triad comprising aims, constraints and resources:

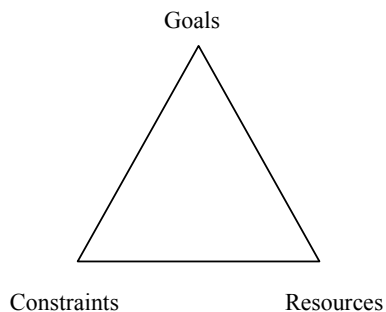


Figure 1: Project management (based on consultations with Professor G. Adlbrecht<sup>5</sup>, February 2011).

According to Figure 1, (global) project management consists of reaching a specific goal having used the resources available and having considered the constraints of a given project. The project constraints include, but are not limited to, the project’s scope, quality, schedule, budget, resources and risks (PMBOK Guide 2008: 6). Depending on the specific project and its environment, project resources (which enable a given project to be carried out) may also be regarded as project constraints. Hence, a question may be posed: How can one measure whether the goal of a project has been achieved? The authors of the PMBOK Guide introduce the concept of the so-called ‘project success’ which brings us to Section 2.

<sup>5</sup> Siegen University, Institute of International Project Management.

## 2. PROJECT SUCCESS

According to the PMBOK Guide, '[Project – J.Z.] Success is measured by product and project quality, timeliness, budget compliance, and degree of customer satisfaction' (PMBOK Guide 2008: 9). Although the PMBOK Guide does not contain an explicit definition of 'project success', the expression is used by its authors to explain matters related to project management. The following examples reinforce this point:

. . . the application of appropriate knowledge, processes, skills, tools, and techniques can have a significant impact on project success. (p. 4)

The project manager must know which individuals in the organization are the decision makers and work with them to influence project success. (p. 28)

Project approval requirements (what constitutes project success, who decides the project is successful . . .) (p. 78)

As an ongoing process, team building is crucial to project success. (p. 233)

Managing expectations helps to increase the probability of project success by ensuring that stakeholders understand the project benefits and risks. (p. 262)

The authors of the PMBOK Guide also use the words 'successful' or 'successfully' applied in a similar context, which is illustrated in the following examples:

The project team must be able to assess the situation and balance the demands in order to deliver a successful project. (p. 7)

This standard describes the project management processes, tools, and techniques used to manage a project toward a successful outcome. (p. 13)

Successful projects require strong leadership skills. (p. 240)

Project Scope Management includes the processes required to ensure that the project includes all the work required, and only the work required, to complete the project successfully. (p. 444)

At one point, the authors make an attempt to describe what project team members have to do so that the project carried out can be regarded as successful:

In order for a project to be successful, the project team must:

- Select appropriate processes required to meet the project objectives,
- Use a defined approach that can be adopted to meet requirements,
- Comply with requirements to meet stakeholders needs and expectations, and
- Balance the competing demands of scope, time, cost, quality, resources, and risk to produce the specified product, service, or result. (PMBOK Guide 2008: 37)

These guidelines are rather vague, and it is not clear what the words 'appropriate' and 'defined' exactly mean, or how to proceed in order to 'comply with requirements' and 'balance' the scope, cost, quality etc. of the project.

More detailed analysis of project success may be found in the book on effective project management at Polish companies (J. Haffer 2009). Its author compared theoretical approaches to project success with the analysis of empirical data from selected Polish companies. Although in her book, written in Polish, the author concentrated solely on selected Polish companies, she compared her results with the findings of other researchers dealing with effective project management worldwide. Comparative analysis confirmed that the results of the Polish author and those of other researchers are similar (J. Haffer 2009: 383). Subsequently, on the basis of her findings, J. Haffer constructed a ‘model of successful project management’, which I present in Figure 2:

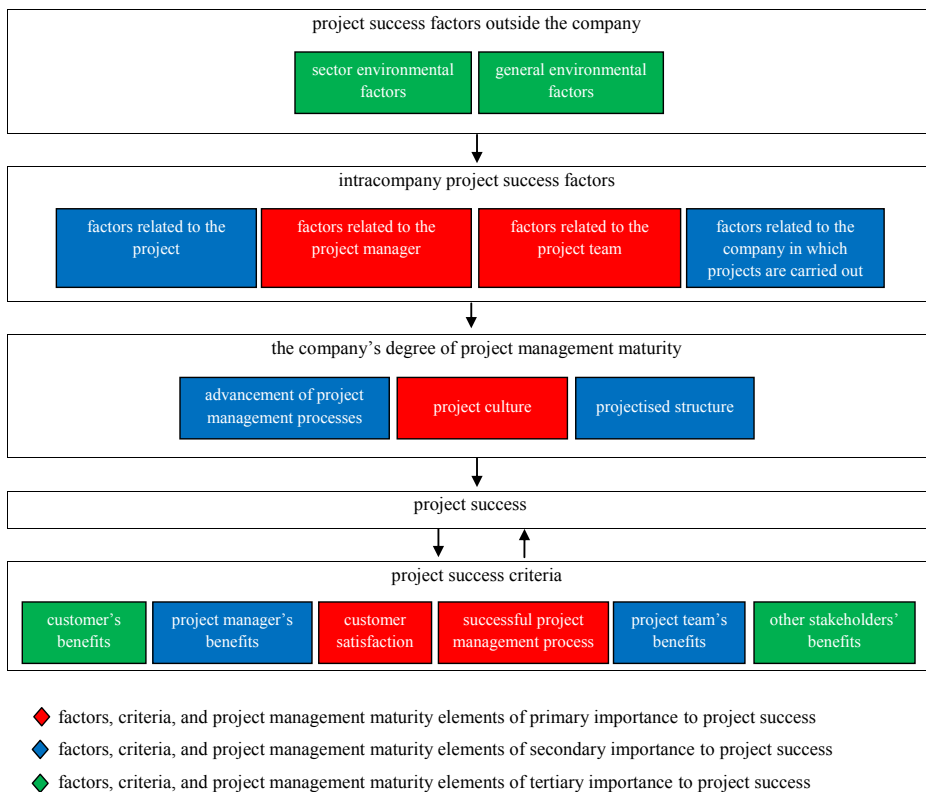


Figure 2: Model of successful project management (J. Haffer 2009: 376, translated by J. Z.).

According to the model presented in Figure 2, project success measures can be boiled down to the following three high-level categories: (a) project success criteria, (b) project success factors and (c) the company's degree of project management maturity. In what follows, I shall briefly discuss the elements of the categories mentioned.

(a) Project success criteria' are principles and standards necessary to evaluate project success (J. Haffer 2009: 130). Customer satisfaction and successful project management process constitute the most important project success criteria. Customer satisfaction (feedback) is becoming more and more important in contemporary project management, although it needs to be regarded as subjective. Project management process relates to various activities/tasks which must be carried out in such a way so as the goal of a given project is reached during the specified period of time, within the approved budget and in accordance with the customer's quality requirements (J. Haffer 2009: 123). According to the author of the successful project management model, the project success criteria mentioned, i.e. time, cost, quality and customer approval, as well as customer satisfaction constitute the 'basic (primary) criteria' (*ibid.* p. 120). Other project success criteria showed in Figure 2, i.e. benefits to the project manager, benefits to the project team, benefits to the customer, benefits to other stakeholders, are secondary project success criteria (*ibid.* p. 120).

(b) Project success factors relate to all conditions, facts etc. which influence the results/evaluation of the project (J. Haffer 2009: 131). In other words:

. . . project success factors are key variables on the basis of which project success may be explained. Paying attention to them increases the effectiveness of all processes undertaken during project management and the probability of reaching the desired result of the project. (J. Haffer 2009: 224, translated by J. Z.)

J. Haffer differentiates between project success factors outside the company and intracompany project success factors. The former are highlighted in green in Figure 2 due to their tertiary importance in project management. There are two types of project success factors outside the company: general environmental factors, e.g. political, legal, economic, technological, connected with the nature of the sector; and environmental factors related to, for example, competition, contractors, society, regulations within the given sector (J. Haffer 2009: 157ff). Intracompany project success factors include factors connected with the project manager, with the project team, with the project itself (its scale, value, urgency, uniqueness, density etc., see *ibid.* p. 138ff), and with the company in which projects are carried out (executive managers' support, the company's organisational system and structure, etc.). Factors related to the project manager and to the project team, i.e. mainly their specialist knowledge and skills (see Section 1.2.), are of utmost importance to project success, hence they are highlighted in red in Figure 2.

(c) Figure 2 shows that project success is also influenced by the so-called 'company's degree of project management maturity', especially by 'project culture' (marked in red). In this paper I use the term 'team culture' instead of 'project culture', as the term 'team culture' refers to people participating in the project who represent some cultural properties, whereas a project as such cannot



(literally) represent or have any culture or cultural properties (see Section 4.3.). According to J. Haffer (2009: 188), the company's degree of project management maturity is also influenced by the advancement of project management processes, i.e. by the formalisation and standardisation degree of project management processes adopted in a given company.

As a final note, I would like to present two conclusions drawn by J. Haffer with regard to project success:

1. customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of the project management processes are the most important project success measures;
2. regardless of project nature and project uniqueness, project success depends on the intra-company factors, in particular on factors connected with the project manager and with the project team; it turns out that people have the greatest impact on project outcomes; project success or project failure depend on them; it is the potential in people, both managing and carrying out the project, that influences an increase in success of all project management processes. (J. Haffer 2009: 380, translated by J. Z.)

I would like to underline the author's statement concerning the crucial role of the project manager and the project team members for project success. Experts dealing with project management have drawn similar conclusions, for example: 'Projects get done by people, not by tools or techniques or technology.' (S. Nokes, S. Kelly 2007: 243), 'If we analysed project success measures, the factors relating to human beings would be in first place.' (J. Kisielnicki 2011: 178, translated by J. Z.). These views may be based on the fact that (global) project management consists mainly in communication. M. Pawlak (2006: 252) maintains that project managers spend about 50 per cent of their working time communicating with their team members. Other practitioners are of the opinion that project managers communicate with other project team members for as much as 90 per cent<sup>6</sup> of the time whilst carrying out projects. According to the PMBOK Guide:

Project managers spend the majority of their time communicating with team members and other project stakeholders, whether they are internal (at all organizational levels) or external to the organization. (PMBOK Guide 2008: 243)

The reason why project team members spend so much time communicating with one another is probably the uniqueness of project tasks (see Section 1.1.). In other words, the tasks undertaken by project team members are based on communication. The role of communication in project management has been acknowledged by experts in project management, as reflected in literature on project management (see Chapter 10 'Project Communications Management' of the PMBOK Guide 2009: 243–271, also books on project management, e.g.

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<sup>6</sup> PMDays Platforma Szkoleniowa Workshop 'Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood' by Mr Tomasz Gola from the Project Management Institute at the Warsaw School of Economics held on the 22nd of November 2011.

P. Wachowiak et al. 2004: Section 4.3.; M. Pawlak 2006: Section 5.3.; M. Trocki, B. Gruzca, K. Ogonek 2009: Section 4.11., M. Campbell 2009). I consider the recent developments in project management perception to be of vital importance. I also think that actions taken by project team members should mainly be regarded as communicative tasks, i.e. as specialist communicative interactions. This may well be noticed when analysing the work of global virtual teams.

### 3. GLOBAL VIRTUAL TEAMS

In this paper, I adopt the definition of ‘global virtual teams’ as presented by N. Zakaria, A. Amelinckx and D. Wilemon (2004: 15 ff) in their article ‘Working Together Apart? Building a Knowledge-Sharing Culture for Global Virtual Teams’. According to the authors, the meaning of the term ‘global virtual team’ is a collection of meanings of two terms, i.e. ‘global team’ and ‘virtual team’:

... we use the term ‘global virtual teams’, which adds a more intricate phenomenon, but not a strangely different concept from both the meaning of virtual and global teams. (N. Zakaria, A. Amelinckx, D. Wilemon 2004: 17)

With regard to the expression ‘virtual teams’, the authors underline that it is the degree of reliance on electronic communication that should be taken into account, and not the mere fact that team members use technology (*ibid.* p. 16). Moreover, the term ‘virtual teams’ indicates that the project team members have not collaborated in the same, identical composition before, and that they hardly ever meet face-to-face. In contrast, the term ‘global teams’ not only relates to the fact that the team members work in different countries, but it also refers to the functional diversity of the team members who carry out a given project (cf. K. K. Wheatley, D. Wilemon 1999):

... global teams are defined as a team that is comprised of individuals located in many countries or geographic areas, and team members differ in their functionality, which adds complexity to group dynamics. (N. Zakaria, A. Amelinckx, D. Wilemon 2004: 16)

Furthermore, the authors mention two more terms with regard to global project teams: ‘transnational teams’ and ‘multicultural teams’, and they highlight that members of global project teams do not only represent a different country or speak various mother tongues, but they also have different cultural properties (*ibid.*) (see more Sections 4.2. and 4.3.).

To conclude, I use the term ‘global virtual teams’ when dealing with project management in global corporations. Although this term does not contain the word ‘project’, I believe that the (project management) context, in which this term is

used, leaves no doubt that the term refers to project teams in global corporations. Hence, I adopt the following definition of the expression ‘global virtual team’ in this paper:

... global virtual teams are not only separated by time and space, but differ in national, cultural and linguistic attributes, and use information and communication technologies as their primary means of communication and work structure. (N. Zakaria, A. Amelinckx, D. Wilemon 2004: 17)

Moreover,

... global virtual teams require innovative communication and learning capabilities among different team members across organizational and geographic boundaries. As a result, the intra-team social interactions and work processes cannot be compared to conventional team structures or treated as such by team members. (*ibid.*)

As regards ‘work processes’, I would like to stress once again that work in global virtual teams is based on communication:

Organisatorische Neugestaltung aufgrund ökonomischer Anpassungszwänge ... und der sich gegenwärtig vollziehende Wandel der Wertschöpfungsprozesse (Ablösung materieller durch immaterielle Wertschöpfung) lassen Arbeit kommunikationsintensiver bzw. Kommunikation zur Arbeit werden. (Ch. Funken 2008: 108)

It is worth noting that communication is one of the most salient aspects of global virtual teams (see M. Amberg, M. Reinhardt, M. Kittler 2008: 183). However, it may be challenged by various factors, e.g. by time delays, lack of a shared language, reduced social and cultural context clues etc. (*ibid.*). Issues relating to communication in global virtual teams are discussed in Section 4.

#### 4. COMMUNICATION IN GLOBAL VIRTUAL TEAMS

Before I dwell on communication in global virtual teams, I would like to make some general remarks on communication in project teams. Communication in project teams may be called ‘lateral’, as employees belonging to a given team are at, or about, the same hierarchical level in their departments or companies. All project team members communicate with one another, that is why the communicative structure of project teams is regarded as full (open). The central role is played by the project manager, a liaison in the communication process due to the fact that he is usually informed of everything that happens while the project is carried out. The project manager is responsible for the project so he may be regarded as a superior (marked in grey in Figure 3). Therefore, the communication network in a project team may be presented as follows:

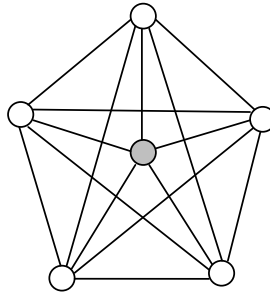


Figure 3: Communication network<sup>7</sup> in a project team.

The aspects of communication in global virtual teams based on the general remarks on communication in project teams, need to be considered alongside the characteristics of global virtual teams presented in Section 3. Hence, it should be taken into consideration that in the majority of cases employees performing a global project belong to and are based in different countries (i.e. represent different cultural properties), speak different languages, have diverse areas of expertise and conduct their work through electronic media (see A. Majchrzak, A. Malhotra 2003: 7). It is worth noting that in order to meet the requirements of a given client who commissioned the project, members of global virtual teams are drawn from different departments (or even from different companies) located in various countries. That is why (global) project management is considered to be a multidisciplinary field, and project teams (global virtual teams) are sometimes referred to as multidisciplinary teams. As far as electronic media are concerned, I would like to stress that members of global virtual teams apply ‘multiple communication methods’ while working on a given project (M. Amberg, M. Reinhardt, M. Kittler 2008: 183). This means that they use at least two or three tools in order to communicate (see U. Kleinberger Günther 2005: 306, Ch. Funken 2008: 107, see also ‘multi-channelling’ e.g. W. Holly 2006, ‘multimodality’ e.g. F. Bargiela-Chiappini 2009: 12, C. Nickerson, B. Planken 2009: 18 ff.). The communication tools are not used interchangeably, but so to say simultaneously, in order to ‘intensify communication’ (see J. Meier 2002: 69). Among the communication tools used most frequently by members of global virtual teams are electronic tools (e.g. e-mail, communicator, audio-/videoconferences) and Web 2.0 tools (e.g. wikis, (discussion) fora, (micro)blogging). Selected tools used by members of global virtual teams for communication purposes are presented in greater detail in E. Harrin (2010). Bearing in mind the organisational and technical characteristics concerning communication in global virtual teams, I canvass

<sup>7</sup> The communication network presented in Figure 3 complies with the formula concerning ‘the total number of potential communication channels’ as presented in the PMBOK Guide (2008: 253), which looks as follows  $n(n-1)/2$ , where  $n$  represents the number of stakeholders, and in this paper, the number of project team members.

cultural and linguistic aspects of communication carried out by members of these teams in Sections 4.1.–4.3.

#### 4.1. ANTHROPOCENTRIC APPROACH TO (INTERCULTURAL AND INTERLINGUAL) SPECIALIST COMMUNICATION

To discuss linguistic and cultural aspects of communication in global virtual teams, a sound theoretical foundation should be adopted. For this purpose, I have chosen the basic tenets of anthropocentric linguistics as laid down by F. Grucza (1983, 1989, 1992a,b, 1993a,b, 1997, 2010a) and subsequently developed by S. Grucza (2006a,b, 2008, 2010a,b) into anthropocentric linguistics of specialist languages and specialist communication (see S. Grucza 2008 'Lingwistyka języków specjalistycznych' [Linguistics of specialist languages]). In the light of anthropocentric linguistics (of specialist languages and specialist communication), the process of specialist (human) communication may be depicted schematically in the following manner:

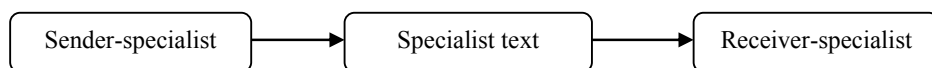


Figure 4: Specialist communication model.

In the model presented in Figure 4, the following elements are of great importance: (a) participants, i.e. the sender-specialist and the receiver-specialist, and (b) specialist texts. Before I describe in detail the elements in Figure 4 and elaborate on specialist communication, I would like to stress that the specialist communication model is not taken for granted amongst researchers dealing with specialist communication. The term 'specialist communication' may refer to communication among specialists (specialist-specialist communication), as it is the case in this paper. Moreover, the term 'specialist communication' may be applied to communication between a specialist and a non-specialist, for example to communication between a doctor (specialist) and a patient (non-specialist) (see more E. Reuter 2008: 71 ff). If the meaning of the term 'specialist communication' is narrowed to specialist-specialist communication, there are still some problems, which may affect the research results. Namely specialists are not always 'equal' partners when communicating: 'Fachleute sind stets mehr oder weniger Fachleute' (E. Reuter 2008: 72). In this sentence, the author's intention was probably to indicate the various scopes of specialist knowledge represented by those specialists in question. I take the comment made by E. Reuter into consideration in this discussion on specialist communication in global virtual teams.

The participants (a) mentioned in Figure 4, the sender and the receiver, specialists in a given field, have special linguistic properties, i.e. they use a certain specialist language, thanks to which they produce and send specialist texts as well as receive and understand them. According to anthropocentric linguistics, a specialist language is always connected with a concrete specialist, and it is located in the brain of this specialist. In other words, a *specialist language* is a specific (immanent, integral and constitutive) property of a specialist's brain (S. Grucza 2010a: 49–50). A specialist language of a concrete human being (specialist) is called his specialist idiolect, whereas a collection of specialist idiolects of a given group of specialists constitutes their specialist polylect. Thanks to specialist lects, specialists produce specialist texts in order to express (transfer) specialist knowledge. It is worth pointing out that real specialist languages are fully autonomous as far as their function is concerned: They are not variants of general (common, basic) languages as it is not possible to translate a text formulated in a specialist language (idiolect) into a text in a general (idio)lect, preserving the same informative accuracy. A specialist language and a general language refer to various scopes of reality (S. Grucza 2006a: 34–35). Nevertheless, from the linguistic point of view specialist languages are not complete languages, i.e. specialist (idio)lects and the general (idio)lect share phonemics, graphemics, morphemics, grammar and lexis, and they differ with regard to terminology and textemics (text patterns). It is not possible to fully differentiate between a given specialist (idio)lect and a general (idio)lect with regard to either meaning or form (see S. Grucza 2006a: 34). For instance, it is not possible to strictly separate the Polish language of project management from the 'national' Polish language. The Polish language of project management is based on the phonemics, graphemics, morphemics, grammar and lexis of the basic Polish language. If a person speaking the Polish language of project management mastered the components mentioned, regardless of his Polish (general) idiolect, this person would be bound to have a double set of the same linguistic properties, which cannot be true. Moreover, it is impossible to separate one specialist idiolect of a given specialist from another specialist idiolect (see more S. Grucza 2006a: 33). Thus, it is not possible to classify specialist languages horizontally or vertically (see more J. Osiejewicz 2009).

Specialist texts (b) are produced by sender-specialists and interpreted by receiver-specialists. Similarly to specialist languages, specialist texts are also connected with concrete specialists, i.e. they are not autonomous. Moreover, specialist texts constitute the empirical material for analysis and reconstruction of specialist languages (S. Grucza 2008: 192–193) and specialist knowledge, although they do not contain any specialist language or specialist knowledge. Specialist texts are like products of specialist languages, which, in turn, may be compared to programmes on the basis of which the products (specialist texts) are created (see F. Grucza 1993b: 30). With the help of specialist texts and thanks to

specialist languages, specialists representing a given field express (transfer) their specialist knowledge. Every specialist produces (generates) his own specialist knowledge (idioknowledge) following the example of other specialists' specialist knowledge (idioknowledges<sup>8</sup>), for instance on the basis of specialist texts (S. Grucza 2008: 165–166), as idioknowledge cannot be transmitted literally to any other person (S. Grucza 2011: 41). This means that *specialist knowledge* exists in a real way solely as specialist knowledge of a concrete person (specialist idioknowledge), and it is located in the brain of that person. Hence, specialist knowledge cannot be observed empirically in a direct way.

According to anthropocentric linguistics, the term 'specialist text' may be understood twofold. Firstly, on the expression plane and secondly, on the content plane. In other words, a specialist text is first and foremost a concrete utterance realised in a graphic, phonic or hybrid (graphic-phonic) form, produced by a concrete specialist in a concrete act of specialist communication (S. Grucza 2008: 22). Thus, a specialist text expresses/represents certain content/meaning, but it does not contain any content or meaning (a substitute for meaning values). The degree to which the sender-specialist's intended meaning of a given specialist text is similar to the meaning reconstructed and assigned to this text by the receiver-specialist depends on the specialists' linguistic qualities (specialist idiolects, general idiolects etc.), and on internal and external contexts of the communication process. In anthropocentric linguistics, the reconstruction of a specific meaning (specialist knowledge) assigned to a given specialist text is called *understanding* of a specialist text by a receiver-specialist. Understanding of a given specialist text may be researched on the basis of a given textual interaction, i.e. on the basis of a concrete discourse conducted by specialists.

Specialist texts are also characterised by their specialty. Due to the fact that the term 'text' may be understood twofold, the word 'specialty' should also be comprehended in two ways: as 'expressive specialty' and as 'content specialty'/'informative specialty' (S. Grucza 2006b: 212–214). Expressive specialty may be observed on the basis of the saturation of a given specialist text with terminology ('terminologicality', see D. J. Sax 2012, cf. S. D. Shelov 1982). Terminology is the most 'visible' component of expressive specialty, though not the only one. That is why research concerning specialist languages should not be limited to terms (see also the practical application of such research, D. J. Sax 2012). Expressive specialty may also be observed on the basis of text patterns used by specialists representing a given field. Hence, expressive specialty is gradual, as a given specialist text may be more or less saturated with terms, and may reflect fixed text patterns to a certain degree. Informative specialty is also gradual. It should be analysed in connection with specialist knowledge and spe-

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<sup>8</sup> Although the word 'knowledge' is an uncountable noun in the English language, I use the plural form to underline the fact that knowledge is always related to a concrete individual (specialist) (see also F. Grucza 2004a: 22).

cialist information. Specialist knowledge is expressed by specialists in specialist texts thanks to their specialist languages. The wider the scope of shared specialist knowledge of a group of specialists, the higher the degree of informative specialty of a given specialist text. Specialist information should be regarded from the point of view of the recipient-specialist of a given specialist text. The recipient-specialist (a) receives a signal (information that the text has been received) and (b) identifies or categorises this signal (information that the signal has been identified, see F. Grucza 1997: 17–18). Thus, informative specialty may be observed on the condition that the interactive context has been taken into consideration (see more S. Grucza 2006b: 212–213). Thus, concrete specialist texts are not only used to express or transfer concrete specialist knowledge, but they are also a real means of specialist communication (S. Grucza 2008: 191).

To sum up, in the light of anthropocentric linguistics, *specialist communication* may be described as follows: the sender-specialist formulates a text in such a way as the meaning assigned to this text by the sender-specialist and the meaning assigned to this text by the receiver-specialist are as close as possible. Only then specialist knowledge may be transferred and produced successfully. The effectiveness of *specialist communication* depends on the skills of particular specialists who display these skills in concrete textual interactions.

It needs to be underlined that in the globalisation age, specialists representing various disciplines and located in different countries communicate with one another. Therefore, the aspects of specialists' various ethnocultures and ethnolects should be taken into consideration in the analysis of specialist communication. In this article, I use the term 'specialist intercultural and interlingual communication' when referring to communication of specialists representing various ethnocultures and speaking different languages.

The meaning of the words 'intercultural' and 'interlingual' used to describe communication in the international environment mentioned above, should be explicated as linguistic research on specialist communication in the international environment depends on the proper understanding of the meaning of these words. The scopes of the meaning of 'intercultural' and 'interlingual' may be covered partially, but they are not identical.

The word 'intercultural' means that a given person does not only possess two or more (specialist) cultures, i.e. is multicultural, but he is also able to switch between those (specialist) ethnocultures when communicating with other people (specialists) (see S. Grucza 2008: 162). Furthermore, it is necessary to differentiate between 'intercultural' and 'intracultural'. The word 'intracultural' indicates that a given person can 'switch' between (specialist) cultures within one ethnoculture, whereas 'intercultural' refers to the human ability of switching between (specialist) cultures, being elements of various ethnocultures. In this article, I focus on specialist communication among specialists representing one specialist culture, e.g. team culture, within various ethnocultures, i.e. the Poles' (ethno)



culture, the Germans' (ethno)culture (see more in Ch. M. Schmidt 2001: 97), and between parallel specialist ethnocultures, e.g. between the specialist culture of Polish-speaking project managers and the specialist culture of German-speaking project managers.

The word 'interlingual' may be defined by analogy with explanations concerning the word 'intercultural'. This means that the word 'interlingual' implies the ability to speak at least two specialist ethnolects ('multilingualism') and the ability to switch between these ethnolects (S. Grucza 2008: 162).

Therefore, in *specialist intercultural and interlingual communication* specialists take part who (a) represent at least two parallel specialist ethnocultures and speak at least two parallel specialist ethnolects within the given field, and (b) can switch between these specialist ethnocultures and specialist ethnolects. The concept of specialist ethnolects and ethnocultures may be applied to any specialist interlingual and intercultural communication. Hence, with regard to global virtual teams I narrow this concept and introduce the expressions 'team language' and 'team culture' which I explicate in Sections 4.2. and 4.3. respectively.

#### 4.2. TEAM LANGUAGE

A global virtual team formed in order to deliver a project/projects in global corporations may be called a 'community of practice' (see more in J. Lave, E. Wenger 1991, P. Eckert, S. McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464, M. Meyerhoff 2002). Specialists belonging to a given community of practice develop the so-called 'shared repertoire' (S. Ehrenreich 2009: 131–134):

In the ELF [= English as a lingua franca – J.Z.] we find some instructive pointers which help to build useful links to the three dimensions of a CofP . . . which comprises "mutual engagement", a "joint enterprise" and a "shared repertoire". . . . The first criterion is "mutual engagement", which means that the members need to get together, interacting with each other and thus building relationships. . . . The second criterion involves a "joint enterprise", which is some kind or purpose which is defined explicitly or implicitly and shaped by the participants . . . The third critical characteristic of a CofP concerns the production of a "shared repertoire", linguistic, symbolic, or material etc., over time, as a resource for the negotiation of meaning within the community. (S. Ehrenreich 2009: 131–133)

Issues concerning the shared repertoire, which is of particular interest to specialist communication research, may be specified on the basis of the tenets of anthropocentric linguistics. In the light of anthropocentric linguistics, the 'shared repertoire' of a given project team means that every member of the team has the knowledge of a concrete specialist language (specialist idiolect) and of a concrete specialist culture (specialist idioculture). Thanks to their specialist idiolects and idiocultural properties, project team members can produce, express

and transfer specialist knowledge concerning the project carried out. With regard to global virtual teams, the linguistic and cultural issues need to be specified in greater detail. In order to do this, I shall use the terms ‘team language’ and ‘team culture’ (see Sections 4.3.). I begin with the definition of ‘team language’.

Before I present the definition of ‘team language’, I shall first scrutinise the meaning of the expression ‘project management languages’. Members of global virtual teams conduct specialist intercultural and interlingual discourse with the help of texts produced in English as a *lingua franca*, and to be more precise in Business English as a *lingua franca* (BELF, see L. Louhiala-Salminen, M. Charles, A. Kankaanranta 2005). With regard to project management, I use the term ‘project management language’ because in my view the term ‘Business English as a *lingua franca*’ is too broad, and it can be applied to various disciplines concerning the so-called ‘business’.

I use the plural form of the expression ‘project management languages’ following the guidelines formulated by F. Grucza (2004b) as concerns the term ‘languages concerning European integration and the EU’. Firstly, there is no single language in which the reality related to project management may be described. Instead, the number of such languages should be determined taking into account various factors, such as the country, the line of business, the company in which projects are carried out. It should be emphasised that not only specialist idiolects, but also specialist polylects should be taken into consideration (see S. Grucza 2011: 34–35). Moreover, when determining the number of project management languages, the ‘type’ of communication (internal, external), the project itself and the team that carries out the project should also be considered.

Project management languages are specialist languages within the meaning of anthropocentric linguistics (see Section 4.1.), and they refer to the scope of the reality which may be called ‘project management’ (see Section 1.3.). Only concrete specialist languages of concrete professionals (specialist idiolects) that may be called ‘idiolects of project management’ in the context of project management, exist in a real way. Similarly to other specialist idiolects, idiolects of project management are neither autonomous nor exist on their own. They are located in the brains of professionals in the field of project management (compare remarks on insurance languages and specialists dealing with insurance, J. Osiejewicz 2009: 477). This means that idiolects of project management are not contained in any texts of project management or in any utterances produced by specialists dealing with project management. Instead, with the help of their real languages (idiolects) of project management, specialists produce concrete texts of project management. The collection of concrete idiolects of project management may be referred to as a ‘polylect of project management’.

Texts of project management contain solely signs. On the basis these texts of project management idiolects of project management can be reconstructed. Every professional reconstructs his language on his own, following the example

of other specialists' idiolects of project management. With the help of texts of project management, professionals transfer and reconstruct knowledge of project management. To conclude: Thanks to idiolects of project management, specialists can produce texts of project management. Thanks to idiolects of project management and with the help of texts of project management, specialists can transfer specialist knowledge of project management ('idioknowledge of project management', see S. Grucza 2011: 31 ff). This implies that knowledge of project management cannot be generated on the basis of (specialist) languages other than languages of project management, or with the help of (specialist) texts other than texts of project management (*ibid.* p. 43). In other words, the denotative accuracy of languages of project management influences the accuracy of knowledge of project management and of texts of project management (*ibid.* p. 32).

Analogous to languages concerning European integration and the EU, languages of project management are dynamic, as they refer to the reality *in statu nascendi*, i.e. project management may be defined as a process which constantly develops. Moreover, national languages of project management may be either original or copied (F. Grucza 2004b: 12, J. Zając 2010: 229). However, in this respect there is one difference between languages concerning European integration and the EU and languages of project management. Namely, members of global virtual teams use BELF<sup>9</sup>, and literature on project management is available mostly in the English language, e.g. the PMBOK Guide (2008). That is why, as far as languages of project management are concerned, there is one original language (the English language of project management) and the remaining languages are 'copies' of the original language (e.g. the Polish language of project management).

In my view, in the context of project management, one can introduce the term 'team language' when it occurs that members of a given global virtual team/project team communicate with one another producing texts which can be understood solely by team members. These texts are produced in a language developed by a given group of specialists in order to be applied when delivering a given project. The texts produced in a team language (both terminology and text patterns) are hardly ever understood by members of other project teams.

The term 'team language' appears in the PMBOK Guide (2008: 230). It is written in inverted commas, but its meaning has not been explained in detail. Moreover, it has been used only once, with the following remark:

Team members often have . . . multiple languages, and sometimes operate in the "team language" that is a different language or norm than their native one. (PMBOK Guide 2008: 230)

In this article I also use the term 'team language' introduced in the PMBOK Guide. However, I do not agree with the statement that the team language is dif-

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<sup>9</sup> Business English as a *lingua franca*

ferent from the particular mother tongue of project members. From the linguistic point of view, specialist idiolects of concrete team members are not complete languages, i.e. they are related to their general idiolects as regards phonemics, graphemics, morphemics, grammar and basic lexis, and they differ from the general idiolects as far as terminology and textual patterns are concerned. Moreover, it is hardly possible to fully differentiate between the specialist idiolects and the general idiolects of the team members, either on the expression plane or on the content plane (see S. Grucza 2006a: 34). Hence, it is not possible to separate the team language from the ethnic language of particular team members. The team language is developed on the basis of phonemics, graphemics, morphemics, grammar and basic lexis of the mother tongue of concrete team members. Team members using the team language have not learnt it from scratch, but have developed the language competence needed on the basis of their ethnic idiolects reconstructed beforehand. If the given team members learnt the team language (specialist idiolect) regardless of their mother tongue, they would duplicate a number of identical language components. Similar conclusions may be drawn with regard to communicating members of global virtual teams. Members of global virtual teams start reconstructing the English team language (specialist idiolect) after they have acquired the general English language skills. The general English idiolect skills, in turn, are acquired on the basis of the ethnic languages (idiolects). Therefore, the English team language (polylect) is never developed from scratch, but it is reconstructed on the basis of phonemics, graphemics, morphemics, grammar and basic lexis of the general (basic) English language, the general ethnic languages (idiolects) and specialist ethnic languages (certain specialist idiolects) of concrete team members. However, as concerns its functionality, team idiolect/polylect is a fully autonomous language, as a given team text produced in the team language cannot be translated into basic languages, with all information being accurately transferred. This is due to the fact that the team language and the basic languages refer to varying scopes of reality (see S. Grucza 2006a: 34–35). In addition, I would like to stress that the team idiolect of a given member of the global virtual team and his other specialist idiolects cannot be separated.

#### 4.3. TEAM CULTURE

In Section 4.2., I stated that thanks to their specialist idiolects and specialist idiocultures, project team members can produce, send, receive and understand specialist texts concerning a given project, and thus produce, express and transfer specialist knowledge concerning this project. I elaborated on ‘specialist lects’ in Sections 4.1. and 4.2. In Section 4.3., I focus on specialist cultures.

In general, it can be observed that in the globalisation age people representing various cultural properties have more opportunity to meet and collaborate than ever before. This point has also been mentioned by A. Thomas (2003: 40):

Internationalisierung in allen Bereichen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens, in Politik, Wirtschaft, Kunst, Wissenschaft, Entwicklungszusammenarbeit, Jugendarbeit und so weiter, hat im Kern immer Kulturbegegnung auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen zur Folge. Menschen aus unterschiedlichen Kulturen treffen aufeinander, Arbeitsgruppen, uninationale und multinationale zusammengestellt, müssen kooperieren, Abteilungen, Unternehmen, Verbände und Organisationen aus unterschiedlichen Nationalkulturen kooperieren, schließen Allianzen oder fusionieren über nationale respektive nationalkulturelle Grenzen hinweg. (A. Thomas 2003: 40)

With regard to international organisations, some authors use the expression ‘third culture’ to indicate that during intercultural and interlingual communication (see Section 4.1.), ‘a new and self-contained culture’ emerges, which can be analysed on various levels, mainly individual and collaborative (team, organisation/institution) (K. Knapp 1995: 19). I agree that in global corporations ‘third culture’ may be observed on three levels: the level of individual employees (specialist idioculture), the level of (project) teams (specialist polyculture on a micro scale) and the level of an entire organisation (specialist polyculture on a macro scale). However, within the meaning of anthropocentric linguistics, a ‘third culture’ cannot be regarded as ‘new’ or ‘independent’:

Ob eine grenzüberschreitende Firmenfusion oder Gruppenzusammenarbeit vorgenommen wird, in jedem Fall gibt es keinen neutralen, von allen bisherigen Entwicklungen und kulturellen Prägungen bereinigten Start, also so etwas wie einen Nullbeginn beim Nullpunkt. (A. Thomas 2003: 41)

Third culture may be defined as certain specialist skills/‘strategies’ (see e.g. M. Gerritsen, C. Nickerson 2009: 189), which are developed by specialists on the basis of their ethnocultures and the specialist cultures of given communities of practice (branch of industry, company, etc.) they belong to. With the help of these skills/strategies, specialists may participate in specialist interactions. This also implies that there does not exist one particular or standard third culture but a third culture is a polyculture of a given group of specialists having specific cultural properties, i.e. it is a collection of specialist idiocultures of a concrete group of specialists.

Taking into account the discussion on ‘third culture’, I analyse the term ‘team culture’ in relation to a concrete project carried out by a concrete global virtual team:

Projektkultur: Unternehmensweite Standards müssen existieren, die den Umgang mit Projektmanagement regeln. In jedem Fall hat das einzelne Projekt in Abstimmung mit Lenkungsausschüssen die Möglichkeit, von Standards abzuweichen und im Sinne der Zielerreichung eigene Wege zu gehen. (M. Lauterbach 2008: 336)

Team culture is not developed from scratch, but it is connected with:

- a) general cultures developed by the members of a given global virtual team as members of concrete ethnocultural communities;
- b) specialist cultures developed by the members of a given global virtual team as specialists representing a concrete discipline;
- c) specialist cultures developed by the members of a given global virtual team as members of a concrete community of practice (project management department, engineering department etc.) within a given global corporation.

This means that there is no single or universal ‘team culture’. ‘Team culture’ is developed by the members of a given global virtual team in a given global corporation. Hence, ‘team culture’ is a specialist polyculture on a micro scale, i.e. a team polyculture developed by the members of a given global virtual team working for a concrete global corporation, being a collection of the team idiocultures developed by these members.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

To sum up, I would like to point out that with regard to research on communication in global virtual teams I follow the opinion of Ch. N. Candlin and D. R. Hall (2007: xii) and assume that:

... in Applied Linguistics there can be no good professional practice that isn’t based on good research, and there can be no good research that isn’t informed by good practice. (Ch. N. Candlin, D. R. Hall 2007: xii)

The theoretical remarks on linguistic aspects of communication in global virtual teams presented in this paper were made on the basis of both literature of the subject and my experience as a project team member in a global corporation. Moreover, they have successfully been deployed in my empirical research (see J. Zając 2012), the results of which are in use by a global company. These selected theoretical facets of communication in global virtual teams were built on the tenets of anthropocentric linguistics of specialist languages and specialist communication, which require that research on specialist communication be conducted on the basis of concrete specialist interaction and with regard to concrete specialists. Anthropocentric linguistics also promotes collaboration among experts representing various fields of study in order to analyse professional communication as well as possible, and to apply the results of the analysis to the activities undertaken by professionals in their daily work.

I consider tasks performed by members of global virtual teams and by employees of global companies to be mainly communicative and language-related. In order to properly describe and analyse experts’ ‘language work’ (see I. Piller

2009: 323), interdisciplinary research should be advocated and popularised. Furthermore, this research needs to be subsidised by both business organisations and academic institutions. At present, it is solely co-financed, in selected cases, by the European Union. Interdisciplinary research on multicultural and multilingual communication should be focused on both external and internal communication carried out in the international environment. Scientists should analyse discourse conducted via different means of communication. They should also gain access to both written and spoken texts, and they should be able to interview employees whose texts they analyse. What is more, research on Business English as a *lingua franca* needs to be developed and intensified, especially in countries in which members of global virtual teams actively use English as their second, or foreign, language to perform their day-to-day professional activities. For example, in Poland the results of research on BELF could be implemented in educational programmes at universities (e.g. at faculties of management, economy, applied linguistics, English studies) and in training programmes for employees of global corporations. Although it is hardly possible to teach any lingua franca (see Ch. Meierkord, K. Knapp 2002: 23), specialists working in the intercultural and interlingual business environment should be aware of the issues related to BELF in order to anticipate potential communicative difficulties and to respond to them in a swift and proper way.

I hope that my study will play a small role in attracting further research in the interesting and multidisciplinary, yet underresearched, field of global project management, which is nowadays conducted in both business and academic settings.

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