Culture frame switching in international entrepreneurship

Ivanova-Gongne, Maria; Dziubaniuk, Olga

Published in:
Contemporary Issues in International Business and Entrepreneurship

Published: 14/07/2021

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Document License
Publisher rights policy

Culture frame switching in international entrepreneurship: Sensemaking narratives of Russian migrant entrepreneurs in Finland

Abstract

Migrant entrepreneurs form a considerable proportion of businesspeople in contemporary society. Often, migrant entrepreneurs are more experienced in international business activities than local businesspeople, which may be due to the former possessing better cross-cultural skills The aim of this study is to understand how the bicultural identity of migrant entrepreneurs affects their business practices in host countries and countries of origin. We analyse 8 interviews with Russian migrant entrepreneurs in Finland who have business experience in both Finland and Russia. Results show that both the assimilated and the less integrated entrepreneurs do not engage in active cultural frame switching and mostly stick to either Finnish or Russian cultural frames. The study contributes to international entrepreneurship literature by adopting a constructivist approach to culture and considering the still rarely studied issue of multiculturality in entrepreneurship and international business.

Keywords: migrant entrepreneurship, cultural frame switching, Russia, Finland

1. Introduction

Constantly increasing migration has led to a greater number of businesses being managed by individuals with backgrounds in several cultures. This may be particularly beneficial for small entrepreneurial firms, in which an entrepreneur is the core representative of the firm. For instance, the multicultural identity of migrant entrepreneurs may result in them having better skills at developing and maintaining business relationships with partners across cultures (see Lowe et al., 2011). Therefore, the increasing amount of migrant entrepreneurs creates the need to consider multiculturality and its consequences for the current and future international business environments.

Previous studies on individuals with several cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds have been carried out predominantly within multinational corporations, focusing on intra-organisational employee relationships and/or expatriates (Fitzsimmons, 2013; Kane & Levina, 2017). However, even in intra-organisational contexts, multicultural individuals and their contributions have not been well researched (Fitzsimmons, 2013; Kane & Levina, 2017), and the notion of bicultural and multicultural individuals has been largely neglected in the literature on inter-organisational relationships. Furthermore, the cultural aspects of entrepreneurship in particular and international business in general have mostly been studied using the Hofstede (1980) model (Leung & Morris,

2015; Dabić et al., 2020). Adopting a social constructivist perspective, we regard culture as "a flexible network of specific and situational knowledge," with individuals possessing a repertoire of cultural schemas that constitute cultural knowledge, assist in the process of sensemaking and are reflected in their actions (Ivanova-Gongne, 2015, p. 610). The more exposure and interactions that individuals have with other cultures, the more varied cultural schemas they might possess. Given a certain level of integration, migrants can possess the cultural schemas of both their host and home countries. Consequently, migrants may engage in cultural frame switching – that is, applying appropriate cultural schemas in different cultural contexts.

In this study, we focus on first-generation migrant entrepreneurs – that is, those who have migrated to the host country and have started a business there. In other words, we consider migrant entrepreneurs who were not born in the host country. First-generation migrants are more likely to retain their traditional culture, whereas second-generation migrants acculturate more to the host country (see Zhou, 1997). Furthermore, first-generation migrants score lower in Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) (Cheng et al., 2006), which implies a preference for keeping the two cultural identities separate and "supress[ing] one identity depending on the context" (Brannen & Thomas, 2010, p. 8). Therefore, first-generation migrants may be better at cultural frame switching than, for instance, second-generation migrants, which means they fit the aims of the current study better. However, the ability to switch cultural frames is achieved over time and is "a complex, contextual dynamic experience" that "is accomplished through cultivation of multi-narrative capabilities that allow switching from one culture/narrative style to the other when the cultural context requires" (Lowe et al., 2011, p. 43). As a result, not all first-generation migrant entrepreneurs may possess the same level of bicultural competence.

The aim of the current chapter was to deepen the understanding of how the bicultural identity of migrant entrepreneurs affects their business practices in host countries and countries of origin. More specifically, we investigated migrant entrepreneurs' cultural frame switching by analysing their sensemaking practices when doing business in host and home countries. To achieve our objectives, we conducted interview-based qualitative research and collected narrative stories from several first-generation Russian entrepreneurs in Finland.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, we provide a brief literature overview of the migrant entrepreneurship field and cultural frame switching. Second, we describe the methods applied in the study. Third, we present the findings from the empirical study of eight Russian migrants in Finland. Finally, we discuss the findings and provide conclusions and implications.

2. Migrant entrepreneurship

Globalisation has dramatically intensified migration processes around the world. The integration of migrants shifts countries' demographic and economic structures and influences business practices and patterns of consumption (Adebayo et al., 2017) as well as ethnic marketing

approaches (e.g. Jamal et al., 2015). International migration can be defined as a person's change of residence by moving abroad, irrespective of the reason, for the short term (3–12 months) or the long term (more than a year or permanent residence) (e.g. de Haas et al., 2020). Migration can be caused by various reasons, including forced displacements, such as military conflicts increasing the number of refugees (Shultz et al., 2020), labour migration (or economic migration) in search of better income or business opportunities (Devitt, 2011), and other reasons, such as family or family reunion and study (de Haas et al., 2020). Naturally, the global movement of people leads to increased migrant entrepreneurship.

Migrant entrepreneurship involves all types of entrepreneurial activities performed by immigrants (Dabić et al., 2020). Conventionally, migrant entrepreneurship was said to consist primarily of small businesses, such as ethnic shops or restaurants targeting customers with similar cultural and ethnic identities. Nowadays, migrants' participation is gradually becoming commonplace in knowledge-intensive industries and economies, such as research and development, health care or the information technology industry, and migrants are internationalising their businesses (Nazareno et al., 2019). International migrants' businesses are frequently characterised by transnational business operations that involve family networks or other types of social ties (e.g. Mustafa & Chen, 2010). This process can be illustrated by Chinese businessmen, who develop broad networks of international business relationships via the international Chinese community and family ties, which can be scattered around the world instead of being located only in the country of origin (Wong & Ng, 2002). Social networks and kinship may serve as valuable sources of information about market opportunities and may support market expansion, as shown, for example, by studies on Italian migrants (Smans et al., 2013). Migrants are apt to maintain business relationships with individuals who share their ethnic origin and cultural background. By contrast, social networks may play a small role in the internationalisation of Russian companies, as Russian migrants do not seem willing to support their countrymen and prefer to search for international contacts on their own (Shirokova & McDougall-Covin, 2012). At the same time, Russian migrant entrepreneurs with diverse social networks have the advantage of accessing ex-Soviet countries and establishing partnerships or supply chains with local companies (Shvarts, 2013). Migrant entrepreneurs face fewer difficulties in initiating transnational partnerships with their country of origin because they know the specifics of business conduct, the language, the legislation and the cultural frames.

Internationalising businesses is not only challenging in terms of geographic distance but is also mentally challenging for the entrepreneurs themselves (e.g. Van Houtum, 1999). Even when the countries are located in close proximity, entrepreneurs still may experience uncertainty to do with business expansion due to low trust in other nationalities. Such uncertainty relates to cultural distance that, despite globalisation, is still a major concern for companies' internationalisation efforts, especially when such efforts involve partnerships between developed and developing countries (Beugelsdijk et al., 2018). For example, business interactions between

Finland and Russia, neighbouring countries with a common history (e.g. Koskimies 1981), may involve certain differences in culture and ways of doing business despite the geographical proximity. As countries' political and economic developments shape their business environments, entrepreneurs have to adapt and develop strategies accordingly. For instance, studies on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Finland and Russia have shown that while Finnish managers may enjoy business growth due to their entrepreneurial capabilities, Russian entrepreneurs have to constantly innovate while struggling with a highly dynamic and hostile business environment (Bogatyreva et al., 2017). Therefore, Russian migrants operating in Finland, equipped with all their knowledge and social networks, can serve as conduits to business internationalisation between the Russian and Finnish markets. However, according to previous research, Russian migrants in Finland frequently experience prejudice as being untrustworthy due to common stereotypes about Russians (Nshom, 2015), which may constrain their business relationships with native Finnish entrepreneurs.

Although the understanding of migrant entrepreneurship has advanced over the past few decades (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001), the demand for empirical studies is growing as the context of migration is changing due to constantly evolving ideas, resources, social ties and connections of migrants to their host and home countries (Nazareno et al., 2018; Dabić et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Some studies on Russian migrants have focused on their business activities in host countries (e.g. Mesch & Czamanski, 1997; Jumpponen et al., 2007; Vinogradov & Gabelko, 2010; Vershinina, 2013), but an international approach to migrant entrepreneurship is still missing, especially in relation to business-to-business interactions (Yang et al., 2020). Among the numerous capabilities of migrant entrepreneurs, researchers distinguish their international entrepreneurial and cultural capabilities (Xu et al., 2019). However, "extant research of migrant entrepreneurship has focused more on national culture impact rather than individuals' cultural adaptation" (ibid., p. 525) and the ability to switch between cultures.

3. Cultural frame switching and acculturation strategies

The amount of research on the cultural aspects of entrepreneurship has grown steadily over the past two decades (Dabić et al., 2020). However, studies of the cultural aspects of entrepreneurship mostly focus on national culture and are based on Hofstede's (1980) model (Xu et al., 2019; Dabić et al., 2020). Hofstede's model (1980) fails to consider the complexity and the multifaceted nature of culture (e.g. Cannon et al., 2010; McGrath & O'Toole, 2014), especially when it comes to the individual level. Several researchers in international business have advocated for a more constructivist approach when looking at culture in the international business context (e.g. Leung & Morris, 2015). The constructivist approach regards culture as a "flexible network of specific and situational knowledge" (Ivanova-Gongne, 2015, p. 610). Thus, individuals are considered to possess a repertoire of cultural schemas that constitute their knowledge of, for example, national, professional, organisational and other cultures and assist in

the process of sensemaking, consequently informing the individuals' actions (Ivanova-Gongne, 2015). The application of specific cultural schemas is highly situational and depends on whether an individual is primed with the culture in question (Leung & Morris, 2015) – for example, when needing to interact with a partner from a specific culture. Individuals with backgrounds in several cultures may possess many cultural schemas and may thus be able to engage in cultural frame switching, which implies moving "between different cultural meaning systems in response to situational cues" (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002, p. 493).

In sociology and psychology studies, cultural frame switching is predominantly studied in relation to bicultural individuals (e.g. Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007) and cross-cultural management (e.g. Brannen & Thomas, 2010) and is often linked to bilingualism and the level of acculturation. The level of acculturation depends on "whether to maintain or reject own cultural values" and on "whether to accept and reject the host culture's cultural values" (Pham & Harris, 2001, p. 281). In his seminal work, Berry (1997) outlined several acculturation strategies, namely integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Integrated individuals retain their own cultural values and incorporate those of the host culture. Assimilation implies that an individual is fully integrated into the host culture and rejects native cultural values. When it comes to separation, one's own values are maintained and the host's cultural values are rejected. Finally, when marginalisation occurs, individuals reject both their own and the host country's values.

In the case of cultural frame-switching, the individuals following the integration acculturation strategy are most likely to succeed in effective switching between different cultural schemas and to have a high level of BII (Fitzsimmons, 2013). BII can be defined as the extent to which individuals with multiple cultures "perceive their mainstream and ethnic cultural identities as compatible and integrated versus oppositional and difficult to integrate" (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002, p. 9). Individuals with positive acculturation experiences are frequently better integrated in the host country's culture (Berry, 2011). Furthermore, the absence of prejudices and negative perceptions and the existence of trust towards the foreign culture improve the chances of individuals integrating new cultural schemas into their repertoires (Ivanova-Gongne, 2015). Consequently, individuals with a high level of BII "tend to assimilate to cultural cues and behave in the direction of the cues" (van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015, p. 49), contrary to individuals with a low level of integration.

Few studies have investigated how migrant entrepreneurs' identification with two (or more) cultures affects their activities (Dheer & Lenartowicz, 2018). A recent study by Dheer and Lenartowicz (2018) has shown that a higher level of integration and, as a result, better capabilities at switching between different cultural contexts positively impact migrant entrepreneurs' intentions of establishing a business. Al-Shammari and Al Shammari (2018) have claimed that bicultural skills allow immigrant entrepreneurs to recognise opportunities better and faster. The two studies show that migrant entrepreneurs' cultural skills have a high potential to improve the entrepreneurs' business activities, thus improving their economic contribution to the host countries. However, the aforementioned studies examined migrant entrepreneurship

activities solely in the host-country context. More research is needed on the cultural frame switching capabilities of migrant entrepreneurs in the international, cross-border context. In particular, on the benefits that migrant entrepreneurs' identification with multiple cultures has for developing international business relationships with partners from different cultural contexts, a topic that has received scarce scholarly attention (see Yang et al., 2020). This study aims to contribute towards filling this research gap.

4. Methods

To achieve our study aims, we deemed the qualitative approach to be the most appropriate because it allows obtaining more in-depth knowledge on the issues that we are focusing on (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1989). We conducted eight in-depth semi-structured interviews with Russian migrant entrepreneurs in Finland who have business partners in both Finland and Russia. Russian-speaking immigrants form one of the largest permanently living migrant groups in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2018). Russian migrants are extensively engaged in entrepreneurship and are involved in foreign trade to a higher extent than most migrant entrepreneurs (Joronen, 2012), which may indicate skilful use of cultural frame switching. Finally, despite close geographical proximity and a long mutual history (Tanner & Söderling 2016), cultural differences and misunderstandings still characterise the Russian-Finnish interactions (Ivanova & Torkkeli, 2013; Ivanova-Gongne & Torkkeli, 2018), which makes our study on Russian migrant entrepreneurs in Finland even more worthwhile.

The interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2018 in the native language of the respondents, Russian. Table 1 presents a more detailed overview of the interviewees' characteristics. It should be noted that, by the time of the interview, Interviewee 6 had been living in Finland only for approximately two years; however, being of Russian origin and having previously resided in Israel, he still can be categorised as possessing bicultural skills. We focused on the interviewees' sensemaking stories about developing business relationships with Finnish and Russian business counterparts. To decipher the specifics of cultural sensemaking and cultural frame switching, we used a narrative approach (Brown et al., 2008) to the collected managerial stories. In particular, we applied the holistic-content approach to the collected narratives and looked to interpret the meaning of the different parts of the interviews in relation to the whole (Lieblich et al., 1998). We divided the results into three sections according to the respondents' levels of integration.

Table 1. Interviewees' Characteristics

Interviewee No.	Entrepreneurial expertise in the industry	Residence in Finland, years	Experience of entrepreneurship in Finland, years	Experience of entrepreneurship in Russia/work with Russian business partners, years
1	Business	22	8	8

	consulting			
2	High-tech industry	14	3	3
3	Reseller	9	3	2
4	Reseller	12	12	> 12
5	Retailer in the fashion industry	5	3	5
6	Dental services	2	2	2
7	IT services, consulting	9	5	12
8	R&D of medical devices	9	4	7

5. Findings

5.1. The assimilated entrepreneurs

The entrepreneurs in the first group came to Finland either to improve their life or for family reasons and had studied in the country. Interviewee 1 had Finnish roots and had gone to high school and university in Finland; Interviewee 2 had gone to a Finnish language school in Russia and then moved to Finland to study in college and later in a university; Interviewee 8 had studied for her PhD in Finland. Studies in the host country might have helped these entrepreneurs to integrate into Finnish society, making them more knowledgeable about how to do business in Finland when initiating their ventures. Almost all of them were fluent in Finnish, with only Interviewee 8 claiming that her knowledge of Finnish was sometimes not enough for her to use the language in a professional business situation. However, her lack of language skills was often resolved by having a native Finnish partner in the company.

Due to high integration, all the interviewees in this group felt much more comfortable in the Finnish business environment than in the Russian one. They were also critical of how business was done in Russia. In particular, they mentioned that Russians are often opportunistic, do not know how to listen to other people, often promise many things without fulfilling all the promises, do not respect others' time and are irresponsible:

> *People [Russians] react very critically to every word, they do not know how to listen, do not dig deeper, rush things and, because of that, quickly draw wrong conclusions and very often, because of that, negotiations end bad very quickly.* (Interviewee 1)

> *Russian business partners are unreliable, they do not care about you. Very often they act disrespectfully towards your time and to their promises to you. They do not feel any responsibility for what is going to happen. How to say it . . . they promise too much and do too little.* (Interviewee 8)

All the interviewees in this group praised the Finnish business environment and the ease of doing business in the country. They felt that it was much faster and easier to reach an agreement in Finland with Finnish companies. In contrast to the other interviewees, all the entrepreneurs in this group claimed to have received immense support for their businesses from the Finnish government and native entrepreneurs:

In Finland, there is this phenomenon, I would say, of older people being ready to act as some sort of mentors . . . I had about 3–4 like that, who truly sincerely, with a great, not fake interest observe my business and are ready to help at any second, at any opportunity, and are always ready to advise! . . . Despite the nationality or any other factors. (Interviewee 1)

They provide good support of small business here. If you have a good idea and it is based on some innovation, a unique proposition, then you can receive governmental support . . . I finished my PhD studies and am commercialising the ideas developed in my research. I've developed an innovation, we have applied for patents and started to receive governmental support, which we receive until now . . . Where have you seen such support in Russia? Business is not being supported [in Russia]! (Interviewee 8)

However, the interviewees in this group also brought up the issue of prejudices based on national identity. Interviewee 8 preferred not to accentuate her origin when dealing with partners. Interviewee 1, at some point in his career, felt like an outsider when doing business, both in Russia and Finland: "In Russia, they told me that you are not Russian, you are a traitor, left our country . . . and in Finland, something like, 'What you Russians can do that does not break?'" However, the interviewees did not perceive the prejudices as being highly negative and claimed that the prejudices did not significantly impact them in their business. In general, the interviewees felt that they should act like a "Western European firm" when doing business in Russia, without switching cultural frames to the Russian ones: "No matter what's the situation, you behave like you become a Finnish company, whether you like it or not, you are a Finnish company, and you live by these principles, they suit you, and you would like to implement them everywhere" (Interviewee 2). Consequently, such an important cultural trait of Russian business as friendship was deemed unnecessary by the interviewees in this group.

5.2. The "ethnic" entrepreneurs

The two entrepreneurs in the second group were female and had moved to Finland with their husbands, who had found jobs in Finland. Thus, they can be partially labelled as "'passive immigrants' pushed by others to leave Russia" (Säävälä, 2010). Both interviewees had learned Finnish to the extent that they could express themselves in common life situations but not at the professional level. They both established their businesses due to a lack of job opportunities. Both female entrepreneurs in this group essentially ran an ethnic business aimed at Russians living in Finland or abroad. At first, Interviewee 5 had a garment shop selling Russian-made clothes to the mainstream Finnish market; however, she mentioned that the shop rarely had Finnish buyers, with most customers being international. The clothing shop eventually went bankrupt after a few years, and Interviewee 5 established a "Russian club" organisation, which organises various workshops, social events and the like for Helsinki's Russian-speaking community. Interviewee 7 had a consulting company that helped mostly Russian-speaking migrants to establish their businesses in Finland or assisted Russian companies located in Russia to internationalise to Finland. While both interviewees experienced some difficulties in conducting business in Finland, they felt that the Finnish environment was safer for starting a business than the Russian environment and good for raising children.

Both entrepreneurs had experienced some level of prejudice from their Finnish customers, but, being integrated in the Finnish society and accustomed to Finnish cultural schemas in everyday life, they did not feel isolated from the overall society. Thus, when framing their understandings

of how Finnish customers and partners perceived them, they were kind in their descriptions and tried to reason in a positive way. However, both interviewees admitted that their language level restricted them from doing business to the fullest of their abilities:

> *Sometimes in the shop we heard, "Putin, clothes of Putin!" Well, that's understandable that people still relate it to this, and there is a certain fear, on the level of respect, or somewhere on the level of something else that I don't know*. (Interviewee 5)

> *No, they don't trust [my company] because I cannot fully explain [because of limited language] what I can offer to them. And this is right, you need to sell things in the language of the customer . . .* (Interviewee 7)

Following the Russian cultural schema of close interpersonal interaction in a business context (see Ivanova & Torkkeli, 2013; Ivanova-Gongne & Torkkeli, 2018), social networking with co-natives was important for both interviewees. They often maintained friendships or close relationships with their partners. Social networking with co-natives, both in Russia and Finland, helped them in their businesses, and Interviewee 5 even established a Russian-speaking entrepreneurship society in the Helsinki area to share information about the best business practices, legislation, business opportunities and so on:

> *. . . I decided to create a Russian-speaking entrepreneurship society and did it so that people could network . . . So, at least there is a circle of people with which we discussed things, and we helped each other a lot. Really, we told each other some things [about entrepreneurship] that you won't even be able to read anywhere. You can only experience it first-hand.* (Interviewee 5)

> *I find myself a partner, we work together for quite a long time and then we become friends. We often have it that way, I have several friends with which I started off our friendship from working together.* (Interviewee 7)

In terms of trust between business partners, both women became accustomed to the Finnish cultural schemas of openness and transparency and used them in their everyday life. Even though they knew that if they did business with Russian partners, they should be careful in terms of trusting their partners, they still preferred to act according to the Finnish cultural schema:

> *What is good is that Finland is a small country, everything is transparent and open. You issued an invoice, everything is as it should be and in two weeks it will be paid. There is trust that is based on the fact that everything is open and transparent. In Russia, you cannot trust in such a way.* (Interviewee 5)

> *If we got used in Finland that it is enough to have a verbal agreement or a short letter, in Russia, I think, there is still a need to sign some contract. It is not like they are trying to lie to someone in that way, they [Russians] are simply trying to prove to you that they don't lie . . . But here I calm down people and always say that everything is ok, just come, I believe that you will order, I do not need any proof, I understand it all. . . . We have learned to trust each other.* (Interviewee 7)

5.3. The less integrated entrepreneurs

The three entrepreneurs in the third group considered themselves less integrated in Finnish society. All of them moved to Finland primarily due to work reasons (i.e. they either had their

own business or planned to establish one). Interviewee 6 described Finland as "a land of opportunities" and, at the time of the interview, had lived in Finland for about two years, having previously lived in Israel. Interviewees 3 and 4 were a married couple, had lived in Finland for nine years and were in business together. Despite the significant difference in the length of their stays in Finland, all the interviewees in this group had negative feelings towards the Finnish business environment. The entrepreneurs described misunderstandings with local partners or other business and government actors. All the interviewees in this group thought that entrepreneurs should, first of all, seek more profit and expand their businesses. Honesty and timely performance were essential for them. However, the interviewees in this group had encountered cases of Finns being less honest than they are normally assumed to be.

Similar to the previous group (the ethnic entrepreneurs), Interviewees 3, 4 and 6 had experienced problems due to a lack of language skills. However, while Interviewees 5 and 7 knew the language quite well for the purposes of daily life, Interviewees 3, 4 and 6 either resisted learning Finnish or had not managed to learn it:

> *When I came to Finland, I thought that everything here is done accurately and honestly. I was very much wrong. I came like a blind kitten, even though I knew how to do business. Of course, language hit me like a hammer, I did not know the language. I signed contracts here, from which I suffered a lot in the end, both financially and business-wise. That's due to lack of language knowledge and the way they translate it here . . . I have not found a person who would properly translate a contract for me.* (Interviewee 6)

> *Difficulties were due to the fact that we speak only English. We don't know Finnish. My husband does not want to learn it on principle because he does not like it . . . So, we spoke English, and companies called us about the products, and we offered them in English. They saw that we are not Finns and no one agreed to buy . . .* (Interviewee 3)

All the entrepreneurs in this group stated that they had experienced prejudice due to their ethnicity, which made it harder to do business in Finland. Besides their lack of language skills, the entrepreneurs' names often indicated their origin, and they felt that this made it harder for Finns to trust them. Difficulties due to prejudice ranged from the length of time needed to establish a firm to problems in hiring local personnel and selling the products to local firms. Interviewee 6 stated that only foreigners replied to the job offers posted by his firm and that it took 2.5 months to register the firm, whereas, for locals, it usually takes 2 weeks. The interviewee also mentioned that it was hard for him to attract Finnish partners. Although Interviewees 3 and 4 had a Finnish business partner, they experienced many misunderstandings with their partners, particularly due to different mentalities and views on what is important in business:

> *We even had a conflict with this Finn. Me and my husband always aimed at increasing the volume, increasing profit, so that the company develops somehow. And for our partner, it was enough like it is. He did not want to increase the amount of sales and volume of purchases. That is where we had our misunderstandings . . .* (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 6 also perceived Finnish businesspeople as being comfortable with what they have and not having the "desire to grow," which differed from the way he wanted to do business. All the entrepreneurs in this group followed the Russian cultural schema of profit orientation in

business (Ivanova & Torkkeli, 2013). Furthermore, the entrepreneurs had a feeling that it is not worth to introduce something new to Finnish customers because the latter prefer traditional things:

> *They do now have a willingness to grow. They don't want to improve themselves. They are happy with what they have, with what they know and they believe in it. And, nowadays, we are thinking with my partner that maybe there is no need to introduce new things here. We should emphasise those things that Finns are already used to. Because they are cautious about new things. They do not want to grow or understand something new . . . they do not need it.* (Interviewee 6)

In general, although they felt that doing business in Russia was easier due to similar mentalities, they considered business in Finland to be safer and more predictable.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The results show that despite clearly knowing both countries' cultural schemas, the interviewees mostly refrained from switching between cultural frames in their international business activities, preferring to comply with Finnish business customs. Similar to previous literature on the acculturation of migrants (Berry, 1997), more assimilated entrepreneurs were more prone to use Finnish cultural schemas than the Russian ones. However, it should be noted that all the more assimilated entrepreneurs came to Finland without having proper work experience in Russia. As a result, they might not have had the chance to be exposed to the Russian cultural schemas of doing business and had to base their knowledge of how to operate in the business environment mostly on the Finnish cultural schemas. The less integrated interviewees had already worked as active entrepreneurs before coming to Finland and, as a consequence, referred to the Russian cultural schemas more when discussing how business should be run. They also reported a larger number of challenges, and, consequently, their negative acculturation experiences might have influenced their overall low levels of integration. This was contrary to the assimilated entrepreneurs, who had had a positive acculturation experience and felt like they had received enough support from Finnish entrepreneurs and government. The ethnic entrepreneurs followed an integration strategy and managed to retain their own values while also integrating the host country's values, despite their businesses being aimed at fellow citizens.

In line with previous literature, prejudices on a national basis and lack of language skills were among the main challenges that the entrepreneurs faced when doing business in the host country (Sui et al., 2015; Razin, 1993). However, different groups of entrepreneurs faced different challenges. The assimilated entrepreneurs were fluent or had good language skills and, for the most part, did not perceive the prejudices to affect their businesses. Moreover, some of the assimilated entrepreneurs felt prejudices towards themselves when doing business in Russia. While the ethnic entrepreneurs perceived the prejudices directed at them more intensely, including in business life, they justified such prejudices by referring to their own lack of language skills and insufficient integration. Such an attitude might be explained by their businesses being aimed at fellow citizens and by the lack of need to seek Finnish customers or

partners. Furthermore, both ethnic entrepreneurs were female, which might have contributed to a kinder description of Finnish nationals. The less integrated entrepreneurs sensed more prejudices towards them than the other groups, lacked language skills and perceived more the differences in mentalities, which also affected their businesses.

This study contributes to scholarship on international business and entrepreneurship literature in several ways. First, it adds to the growing literature on migrant entrepreneurship by specifically investigating how individuals' identification with two cultures affects their activities (see Dheer & Lenartowicz, 2018). Second, while the current study looks mostly at the host-country context, it also touches on the entrepreneurs' perceptions of doing business in their home-country context. Thus, the study contributes to the scarce literature on migrant entrepreneurs' business activities in an international, cross-border context (e.g. Sui et al., 2015). Third, this is one of the few studies to examine business relationships from a bicultural individual perspective while also adopting a constructivist approach to culture (see Dabić et al., 2020). We posit that multiculturality is an important contemporary issue in entrepreneurship that deserves more attention, both in future research and in practice, and whose analysis may contribute to understanding international business relationships in the context of the ever-increasing global movement of people. This applies not only to companies being multicultural entities but also to individuals masterfully applying different cultural schemas in their business interactions across cultures.

This study carries several managerial implications. Migrant entrepreneurs can benefit from this study by obtaining insights into how to apply their bicultural and multicultural competences when interacting with partners in the host and home countries. The results also provide up-to-date knowledge on the challenges that migrants may face when establishing and leading businesses in Finland. Finally, although the interviewed individuals are entrepreneurs, the results can also be useful for multinational corporations by providing more knowledge on bicultural individuals and how they could potentially be an asset as boundary spanners in international business relationships.

The number of interviews in this study was limited due to the small number of Russian entrepreneurs conducting international business, especially in their country of origin. Thus, further research on bigger samples is required to generalise the findings. We encourage more researchers to focus on the cultural aspects of migrant entrepreneurship, particularly by adopting a constructivist perspective on culture.

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