

**Managing multilingual organizations:
Contemporary perspectives and current challenges
CEMS Block Seminar at the Aalto University School of Business
Programme**

September 6 – 10, 2021

Dr. Claudine Gaibrois, University of St. Gallen (Switzerland),
Prof. Rebecca Piekkari, Aalto University (Finland)

Block seminar overview

Many business students will soon be leaving the world of academia for a managerial job or expert position in a global company. Operating internationally often means crossing language boundaries. However, while English is a widely shared language among corporate elites at the apex of the organization, local languages tend to rule lower down in organizational hierarchies as well as in subsidiaries of multinational corporations and external customer-supplier relationships. In this regard, contemporary organizations are multilingual communities where employees need to interact to reach joint outcomes. Language presents itself in many different forms such as national, corporate, technical, or digital. It defines hierarchies and power structures, facilitates integration, and redirects career paths. It affects the ability of global companies to operate as single entities in pursuit of their overall strategy. Understanding this complex interplay between multiple facets of language and day-to-day operations of global companies is becoming increasingly important to business effectiveness. Therefore, it is fundamental for business students to understand and appreciate this management challenge.

This block seminar will introduce students to language-sensitive management – a topic rarely covered in management programmes at business schools. It offers an innovative, language-sensitive approach to managing a global workforce. Students will identify opportunities associated with managing a multilingual workforce, learn how to analyse the challenges arising from language diversity, and develop appropriate solutions and coping mechanisms to manage them. Through participation in this block seminar, these future managers will become more attentive to the complexity and the subtleties of multilingual realities, assisting them in becoming more inclusive and responsible leaders.

Block seminar content

The seminar will introduce students to contemporary scholarly perspectives (functional, cross-cultural and critical) and alternative views on managing multilingual organizations. The class discussions and guest lectures provide an overview of scholarly insights and an opportunity to learn from first-hand experiences of practitioners in different organizational contexts. The block seminar strongly encourages students to engage in self-learning and reflection on their own experiences through role plays and work in diverse teams.

The seminar is conceived as a dialogue between academic knowledge based on state-of-the-art research, practical examples, and reflection. The wealth of experience that students bring to the classroom is a valuable resource for the block seminar. The seminar adopts a transformative approach to teaching and learning, which aims at shifting students' mindsets and challenging pre-conceived assumptions about the topic. The instructors act as coaches who encourage and facilitate students' learning through moderation and feedback. During the week, students will conduct case studies to explore the complexity of multilingualism at workplaces, to train their skills in project management and get exposed to constructive collaboration in diverse teams. In group discussions and final presentations, students will practice their argumentation skills and public speaking. Taken together, the block seminar develops students' professional, social, and personal competences.

Key themes

- Multilingualism at the workplace through the critical, cross-cultural, and strategic lens
- Definition and application of language management and language-sensitive management
- Different strategies for managing a multilingual workforce
- Leadership in multilingual contexts
- Language capital and company growth

Learning objectives

- To understand the specific challenges and opportunities of language-sensitive management
- To become familiar with language strategies and practices employed in multilingual organizations across contexts
- To develop individualized strategies for successful language management

Meet the faculty

Dr. Claudine Gaibrois



Dr. Claudine Gaibrois is a lecturer at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland), at the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland) and at the Ecole de Management Strasbourg (France). Her research focuses on diversity, particularly on the diversity of languages and cultures, power and participation. Claudine Gaibrois has conceived and taught lectures on the management of language diversity in different educational contexts and in different formats. She also offers practitioner-oriented trainings on successful communication in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Before returning to academia, Claudine Gaibrois worked in print and broadcast journalism for many years, including a position as editor-in-chief of a Swiss culture magazine. Claudine Gaibrois is a board member of the GEM&L (Groupe d'Etudes Management et Langage) and has joined its scientific committee.

Contact

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Selected publications

Steyaert, S., Ostendorp, A. and Gaibrois, C. (2011). Multilingual organizations as 'linguascapes': Negotiating the position of English through discursive practices. In: *Journal of World Business*, 46(3): 270-278.

Gaibrois, C. (2018). "It crosses all the boundaries": Hybrid language use as empowering resource. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(1/2), pp. 82-110.

Professor Dr. Rebecca Piekkari



Rebecca Piekkari is Marcus Wallenberg Professor of International Business at Aalto University, School of Business. Her research focuses on managing multinational corporations and the challenges and opportunities posed by workforce diversity. She also takes an interest in translation of organizational practices across borders. She is an expert on the use of the case study in international business research. Her work has been published in leading management journals such as the *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Management Studies*, and *Journal of International Business Studies* as well as in several handbooks in the area. She has been member of the CEMS Quality Committee and CEMS Executive Board.

Contact

rebecca.piekkari@aalto.fi

Selected publications

Piekkari, R., Welch, D. E. and Welch, L. S. (2014). *Language in International Business: The Multilingual Reality of Global Business Expansion*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Outila, V., Piekkari, R., Mihailova, I. and Angouri, J. (2020). "Trust But Verify": How middle managers in a multinational corporation translate an imported management concept. *Organization Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840620934065>

Meet the speakers

Monday September 6

15:30 – 16:30

'Leading a linguistically diverse orchestra' Kalle Kuusava (Opera Director and Music Director, Croatian National Theatre, Croatia)
[Link to homepage](#)



Tuesday September 7

11:00 – 12:15

'Designing a language strategy in a multilingual context' Ciara O'Higgins (Lecturer, Deusto University, Spain)
[Link to LinkedIn](#)



14:00 – 14:45

Round table: *'The role of language capital in the growth and expansion of small and medium-sized firms'*

Kevin Shakespeare (Institute of Export and International Trade, UK)
[Link to biography](#)



Tony Löfving (Head of HR, Smarp, Finland)
[Link to LinkedIn](#)



Ulla Hiekkänen-Mäkelä (Head of Talent Boost Finland, Business Finland)
[Link to Twitter](#)



Wednesday September 8

09:30 – 10:30 *'Planning and implementing a new language strategy'* Ran Lavie (Diversity, Inclusion and Leadership Manager, If, Sweden)
[Link to LinkedIn](#)



13:00 – 14:00 *'Language and culture'* Anne Kankaanranta (Senior lecturer, Aalto University School of Business)
[Link to biography](#)



Thursday September 9

11:30 – 12:30 *'Language-based discrimination in student job advertisements'* Shuangyi Chen (Master's Thesis Student, Aalto University School of Business)
[Link to LinkedIn](#)



13:30 – 14:30 *'Aalto International Talent Programme'* Kaisa Paasivirta (Career Services Manager, Aalto University)



Assessment of the block seminar

Apart from their active participation and contribution to the seminar, students will be asked to conduct an empirical case study in groups based on research questions which they develop at the beginning of the block seminar. The development of the case study will be supported by the faculty. Cases can be chosen from the various organizational contexts that students are already familiar with or will be introduced to by the guest speakers. Students will present the findings of their case study in groups on the final day.

Students are graded mainly (60%) based on the case study they conduct in groups.

The assessment of the block seminar consists of the following four elements:

1. Assessment of the group presentation, including assessment of how well the student group served as a discussant for another student group (60% of the grading)
2. Meaningful individual contribution to class discussion (10% of the grading)
3. Individual pre-assignment (see below; 10% of the grading)
4. Individual reflection paper (see below, 20% of the grading)

Pre-assignment

Students are requested to submit a pre-assignment before the seminar. The task consists of answering the following question:

- Describe a personal experience with multilingualism from the private (i.e. hobbies, extracurricular activities) or the professional (i.e. paid or voluntary work) context and discuss it in the light of at least two texts that you choose from the reading list. You may want to include reflections on your own language identity.

The pre-assignment consists of a maximum 1,000-word (including references) written report, which is due one week before the start of the block seminar, i.e. by August 30, 2021 at 23:59. This report is to be returned to the MyCourses submission box.

Reflexive essay

Students are requested to submit an individual reflexive essay after the seminar. The task consists of engaging in reflexivity on how language and language diversity played out over the course of the block seminar week (in teaching, guest lectures, collaboration in research project groups etc.), regarding both their own role and the overall seminar. The students are encouraged to use the reading by Cunliffe and Jun (2005) as a source of inspiration.

The reflection paper consists of a maximum 1,500-word (including references) written report that is due one week after the end of the block seminar, i.e. by September 17, 2021 at 23:59. This report is to be returned to the MyCourses submission box.

List of readings

Note: Kankaanranta, Karhunen & Louhiala-Salminen (2018) can be found from the Materials-folder in MyCourses; all other articles are available from Aalto's library.

Cross-cultural management and multilingualism

Kankaanranta, A., Karhunen, P., & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2018). "English as corporate language" in the multilingual reality of multinational companies. *Multilingua*, 37(4), 331-351.

Diversity and inclusion

Lauring, J. and Klitmøller, A. (2017) "Inclusive language use in multicultural business organizations: The effect on creativity and performance." *International Journal of Business Communication* 54(3). 306-324.

Employees' strategies to manage multilingualism

Barner-Rasmussen, W., Ehrnrooth, M., Koveshnikov, A. and Mäkelä, K. (2014). Cultural and language skills as resources for boundary spanning within the MNC. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45(7). 886-905.

Gaibrois, C. (2018). 'It crosses all the boundaries'. Hybrid language use as empowering resource. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(1-2). 82-110.

English in multilingual organisations

Steyaert, S., Ostendorp, A. and Gaibrois, C. (2011). Multilingual organizations as 'linguascapes'. Negotiating the position of English through discursive practices. *Journal of World Business*, 46(3). 270-278.

Introductory reading

Sanden, G. R., & Kankaanranta, A. (2018). English is an unwritten rule here: Non-formalised language policies in multinational corporations. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 23(4). 544-566.

Managerial strategies to manage multilingualism

Brannen, M. Y., Piekkari, R., & Tietze, S. (2014). The multifaceted role of language in international business: Unpacking the forms, functions and features of a critical challenge to MNC theory and performance. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45(5). 495-507

Brannen, M. Y., & Doz, Y. L. (2012). Corporate languages and strategic agility: Trapped in your jargon or lost in translation? *California Management Review*, 54(3), 77-97.

Multilingualism and power

Vaara, E., Tienari, J., Piekkari, R., and Säntti, R. (2005). Language and the circuits of power in a merging multinational corporation. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(3). 595-623.

Reflexivity

Cunliffe, A.L. and Jun, J.S. (2005). The need for reflexivity in public administration. *Administration & Society*, 37(2). 225-242.

Monday September 6	Tuesday September 7	Wednesday September 8	Thursday September 9	Friday September 10
Block Seminar kick-off and introductions 09:30 – 11:15	Role Play: Negotiating HRM practice transfer across borders 09:30 – 10:30	Workshop: Planning and implementing a new language strategy Ran Lavie, If 9:30-11:00	Workshop: A fish in foreign waters: The case of PLT Consulting 09:30– 11:00	Case Study: Presentations 09:30 - 10:15
Break 11:15 – 11:45	Break 10:30 – 11:00	Break 11:00 – 11:15	Break 11:00-11:30	Break 10:15-10:45
Lecture: Why study language diversity? 11:45-12:45	Workshop: Designing a language strategy in a multilingual context Ciara O’Higgins, Deusto University 11:00 – 12:15	Lecture: Language diversity and power relations 11:15-12:15	Presentation: Language-based discrimination in student job advertisements Shuangyi Chen, Aalto University 11:30 – 12:30	Case Study: Presentations 10:45-11:30
Lunch break 12:45-13:45	Lunch break 12:15-13:15	Lunch break 12:15-13:00	Lunch break 12:30-13:30	Break 11:30-12:00
Case study: Task introduction & getting started with group work 13:45-15:15	Debate: Based on Ted Talk by Tsedal Neeley: Why Global Success Depends on Separating Language & Culture 13:15-13:55	Workshop: Language and culture Anne Kankaanranta, Aalto University 13:00-14:00	Presentation: Aalto International Talent Programme Kaisa Paasivirta, Aalto University 13:30-14:30	Case Study: Presentations 12:00-12:45
Break 15.15 – 15:30	Short break 13:55-14:00	Break 14:00-14:30	Break 14:30 – 15:00	Lunch break 12:45-14:00
Workshop: Leading a linguistically diverse orchestra Kalle Kuusava, Croatian National Theatre 15:30 – 16:30	Round table: The role of language capital for the growth of SMEs 14:00-14:45	Case Study: Group work including an optional coaching session 14:30 – 17:00	Case Study: Group work including an optional coaching session 15:00 – 17:00	Case Study: Presentations 14:00 – 14:45
	Break 14:45 – 15.15			Break 14:45 – 15:15
	Case Study: Group work including a mandatory 15-minute coaching session and the 10 don’ts of case studies 15:15 – 18:00			Reflexivity exercise, Block Seminar wrap-up & feedback Aalto CEMS Block Seminar Survey 15:15-16:15