

Industrial relations and management of multilingual diversity at work

A comparative case study analysis in the Spanish context

IR-MULTILING | CASE STUDY REPORT: SPAIN

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INDEX

Introduction	4
Case Study Summary I	5
Case Study Summary II	12
Case Study Summary III	18
Conclusions	24
List of Interviewees	25
Bibliography	27

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Diversity Management was shaped and developed in the context of the European year of equal opportunities and anti-discrimination as an “active and conscious development of a future oriented, value driven strategic, communicative and managerial process of accepting and using certain differences and similarities as a potential in an organisation, a process which creates added value to the company” (Keil, Amershi, Holmes, Jablonski, Lüthi, Matoba, Plett and von Unruh, 2007). Thus, it is an approach to support and shape the development of anti-discrimination in the EU25. For that, the study Keil et al (2007) detected several cases of "Best Practices" in collective agreements as well as in companies in this field.

The management of multilingualism in the company is a closely related issue with other aspects such as origin, ethnicity, gender and culture. In short, tongue variable interacts with other variables related to immigrant status and possible discrimination. The perception of discrimination on linguistic and cultural reasons is very low in the whole European and Spanish population in particular. However, the perception of discrimination is greater among immigrants (3.5%) than among natives (1%) in Europe (European Social Survey, 2013). That is, the study of language discrimination is hardly separable from other variables associated with immigrant status. Therefore, management of multilingualism and multiculturalism are parallel in business management through policies of equality and diversity management.

Thus, it seems appropriate the implementation of organizational analysis through the case study methodology (Yin, 1994). We will focus for the Spanish context on different cases considering variables such as the sectoral level, the level of qualifications, the role of trade unions, the size and type of company and the percentage of migrants and the level of feminization.

Hence, the study is focused on three different work centers located in the city of Barcelona where the presence of multilingualism is relevant: 1) a construction sector company dedicated to the active inclusion of vulnerable collectives; a multinational company of contact-center services; and an IT start-up specialized on the development of an online platform for business.

I. CASE STUDY SUMMARY | CONSTRUCTION

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

1.1. The *Construction* sector

The construction sector has declined in Spain from the beginning of the economic crisis. In 2007 the 12.7% of the whole employment in Spain was in construction, but in 2014 reached its lowest level with 5.6% of the total employment (Encuesta de Población Activa, 2015). Likewise, the destruction of employment in the sector impacted also on the composition of the employment by company size (Table 1).

Table 1. Evolution of company size (number of employees) in the construction sector in Spain (2007-2011)

	2007	2011
1 - 10	23,6%	45,2%
11 - 25	11,3%	21,0%
26 - 250	17,8%	29,3%
+ 250	47,3%	4,5%
Total	100,0%	100,0%

Source: Muestra Continua de Vidas Laborales (2013)

While in 2007 most workers were located in large companies with more than 250 workers, in 2011 that trend was inverted, predominating the employment in small companies with less than 10 workers.

Table 2. Employees' nationality in construction sector and the total economy (2015).

	Natives	Migrants	Migrants from NSSC*
Construction	84,88%	15,12%	14,16%
Total	86,69%	13,31%	12,63%

Source: Encuesta de Población Activa (INE, 2015).

* Non-Spanish Speaker Countries.

The sector is eminently masculinized: 92.45% of men (Labour Force Survey, 2015). Regarding the origin of workers, there is a slightly higher proportion of migrants in the sector compared to the average of the whole economy (Table 2). Also, it is also higher the proportion of migrants from non-Spanish Speakers. Countries

It is particularly relevant to highlight the trend in the Spanish labour market for migrant workers to occupy the most dangerous and precarious employment, situation worsened during the economic crisis (Alós, 2014). This trend has a higher risk in

construction. Thus, immigrant construction workers have been more susceptible to accidents than locals, having a greater share of accidents involving sick leave (Hernandez, 2012).

Thus, managing diversity and multilingualism in construction sector has been focused on anti-discriminatory policies, but also in the Management of Occupational Health and Safety, meaning that linguistic diversity can be a communication problem that may increase labour risks. Thus, the social partners have taken this matter in the V collective agreement for the construction sector, in which it's highlighted the obligation to train workers in prevention of occupational hazards, with special clarification states:

"In addition, taking into account the presence of immigrant workers in the sector, training and information to these workers must be appropriate to their characteristics, especially if they are unfamiliar with the Spanish language." (BOE-A- 2012-3725, p. 23838)

It is therefore relevant to observe the specific language used in the training and information on Health and Safety issues for foreign workers, as well as the use of other supports like visual media, simultaneous translation and the informal information during the working process.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE COMPANY (*ACTIVEBRICK*)

2.1. *Characteristics of the company*

ActiveBrick is a social foundation specialized in active inclusion of collectives in social risk with particular difficulties in the labour market (migrants, disabled, long-term unemployed, ex-convicts, etc.) offering them a job position. The Construction Division Manager (CS1) highlight that "every worker has an employment contract but also has a social contract, which is the itinerary adapted for each worker and signed by the social worker, the employee and the Division Manager". The most of the workers working with this itinerary are foreigners.

Likewise the term of this insertion itinerary is limited. "As an inclusion company, we try that people stay here around two years. [...]. We think that one person that has forgotten work habits, in two years is possible to recuperate it." In any case, this two-year period it is also due to rotation reasons: "If not, we may not be different from other private companies from the sector. After two years they have to be able to "make a living". And also for reasons of financing: "The issue of the two years also has to do with recruitment aid. The law stipulates that insertion companies until two years have

recruitment aid from Public Administration. [...] Anyway, with or without help, we always have said two years "(CS1).

They develop activities in three main areas: construction (mainly renovations), green economy (waste management) and clothing stores (clothing recycling for reuse). The workforce of the company was about 200 employees during recent years (236 in 2012, 213 in 2013 and 231 in 2014). At this moment (December 2015), the workforce is formed by 130 workers, with 29 of them foreigners (most of them from Morocco and some other countries like Pakistan and Mali).

2.2. Languages and relationships at work

All interviewees (employees, Management and Committee) claim that the language used in the company is Spanish. The Construction Manager recognizes that in the administration offices the Catalan is the common language (where all are natives), while operators use mostly the Spanish because "there many foreigners" (CS1). Still, the Management recognizes that many foreign workers have difficulties understanding the language, which can be a safety problem if there is no proper communication (CS1, CS2 and CS4).

Indeed, in the case of Moroccan workers, the use of Arabic among them is usually a verification of the information received on different aspects of the work process. "The lack of understanding of the language of some workers means that they cannot face specific tasks" (CS5), such as dealing with customers. There are safety risks when they are working without understanding properly the indications (CS1). Therefore, interactions between Moroccan workers in Arabic are common. In any case, the everyday life makes usual the use of Arabic for social interactions in general and not only for work (CS3, CS4 and CS5): "Between us we speak Arabic mixed with some Spanish".

However, the Management denies that situation: "The Moroccan workers speak Spanish among themselves," says CS1. The opposite scenario is considered negative: "When you have a big group of workers from one country is bad because they understand each other and they create Ghettos. [...] That is not happening here because we are all mixed and we speak in Spanish. The opposite alters the coexistence of the group". In that regard, the Construction Manager emphasizes the concept of coexistence: "For us it is very important the coexistence, thus the teamwork. The teams are usually two or four persons working on floors. If there are two or three Moroccans (or Pakistani or Rumanian) they are not getting along with the rest. I do not want to be friend of anyone, but to get along with everyone". Therefore, the Management of the company considers essential to speak only Spanish to benefit the coexistence and

conviviality among workers. And to achieve that, one strategy is the dispersion of workers from the same community to avoid linguistic and cultural ghettos.

However, the Committee consider “normal to speak their language if they are among Moroccans (or Pakistani). They feel out of their land and when they meet a mate they continue with their customs” (CS2). Doing that “foreign workers feel more comfortable” (CS5). In that sense, they are more flexible, but respecting to Spanish workers: “The Moroccan workers, out of respect, speak Spanish when there are Spanish colleagues. And if they do not, someone tell them: ‘Hey, we are more people; try to do so in the way we all understand’. But if they are alone speak always Moroccan ”(CS2).

Such situations can be a reason for reticence and mild conflict between Spaniards and Moroccans. Some workers (CS5) exemplified it with situations where the Spaniards feel suspicious of the content of the conversations of Moroccans, resulting sometimes in xenophobic speeches. For example, considering unfair the fact that there are immigrants working in the company while “there are a lot of native unemployed people” (S5). Foreign workers argue that many of the occasions when they speak in Arabic is due to the fact that some Moroccans still don’t understand well the Spanish, so they need language support from their peers. Still, most assume the assimilationist model of the company recognizing that the path is the integration through language learning and respect for customs (CS3 and CS4). Likewise, all workers value the effort of the company providing employment opportunities for immigrants and supporting them with language courses.

We observe, therefore, the use of the Spanish as a mechanism of control and mutual respect between workers and immigrants, thus minimizing the use of both Catalan and Arabic. In any case, gradually these situations are no longer a conflict due to the profile of new immigrants working in the company. Now, after several years of crisis, almost all foreigners entering in the company speak Spanish perfectly, unlike before. The committee (CS5) point out that this is no accidentally, saying that the company now has greater availability of foreigners without difficulties to understand the Spanish, so they prioritize this profile. The Management (CS1) recognized that today, before choosing someone with language difficulties, they calculate how many workers are in the same situation in different categories, how many who speak well the Spanish and their language, all to find possible co-intermediaries during the work.

2.3. Understanding the labour rights

Most of the interviewees (CS2, CS3, CS4 and CS5) acknowledge that they or some of their colleagues have faced situations in the company where they had troubles understanding their labour rights due to the language. “I think the language itself is a

problem to understand your rights. You do not have the ability to defend yourself"(CS4).

The first support requested is generally to seek help from peers from the same community who understand better the Spanish. Also, all interviewees (except the Management) point out that the Committee is seen as the main source for foreign workers to understand the content of their contracts and to articulate their labour demands. The Committee Chairman is Moroccan, fact that facilitates this type of interaction. Likewise, foreign workers are also helped by the lawyer linked to the Committee. That's the case of the interviewee CS3, who requested to a Moroccan member of the committee to intermediate from Arabic to Spanish. In any case, all foreign workers claim that "is basically a responsibility of the person, not the company" (CS4). Thus, it is responsibility of workers to learn a minimum level of Spanish to understand their labour rights.

2.4. Representation, representativeness and multilingualism

Currently three workers form the Committee, two of them Moroccans. Two are members of the union CGT ('Confederación General de Trabajadores', a libertarian ideology union). Recently, two members of the Committee (the unique women), affiliated with UGT ('Unión General de Trabajadores, Social-democratic ideology union) resigned from the Committee due to disagreements with the chairman (CS5).

There is a high positive consideration of the Committee by all the foreign workers interviewees. The fact that the president is Moroccan may influence. As already noted, the Committee is a resource very appealed by foreigners working in the company and the figure of the president is essential, with good relationships with both the Management and the new foreign workers in the company. Committee chairman (CS5) states that he feels himself supported by all company employees (both foreigners and natives). He considers that his long career in the company (15 years) makes people to know him well, making his Moroccan condition secondary to develop the work of representation of local workers.

3. INITIATIVES AND POLICIES TO DEAL WITH MULTILINGUALISM

3.1. *Language Courses, Training and Prevention of Risk at the workplace*

The objective of *ActiveBrick* is to reduce poverty among social excluded people through an employment contract and the participation of these in economic activities that allow them to re-acquire skills and work habits. In this regard, the company statutes state that the beneficiaries of the Foundation are "all men and women of Catalonia that due to the lack of jobs, the lack of training, the school dropout and other circumstances of life, are immersed in a situation of personal and economic poverty, social marginalization and exclusion from employment with the consequences of loneliness, dysfunctional family, low self-esteem or any of the causes determined by the social services professionals to consider the person as marginalized. "

Therefore, the training aspects are an important point within the itinerary of employment of these workers. In fact, the company stresses that business professionals must be able to "give sufficient active training to their peers" (especially those workers focused on active inclusion tasks). Consequently, training activities are linked both to the employment contract and the "social contract" signed by workers in active inclusion itineraries. In that sense, the objectives of the company is:

- The recovery and / or acquisition of work habits and knowledge from training as waste operator, attending a course, Monday to Friday (3 hours per day);
- To make technical, professional and occupational activities through introductory modules in one of the three activities that the company (Construction, Waste Management and Recycling clothes).
- And classroom activities: environmental training, job search, and occupational Health and Safety.

In any case, these training modules are customized depending on the case. That is the case of foreign workers with problems of understanding Spanish. The company insist to them (majority among workers beginning active inclusion itineraries) to assist to language courses provided by social services. "What makes the social worker is to find them an adult school and to 'force' them to attend. That is, to tell them 'You sign this or you don't have work here.'" And they sign the active social contract "(CS1). Also, the social worker of the company makes a personalized monitoring to check their attendance and achievement in these activities.

In that regard, both Managers and Committee (CS2) are involved enhancing the importance to attend to these. Anyway, the possibility that some active inclusion worker doesn't attend to the programmed activities exists. "If that person does not

fulfil the active inclusion commitment during the two years, we prefer then to contract to someone else. [...] It is as important to accomplish the social contract as coming to work" (CS1). Thus, the company uses an assimilationist approach. That is, their way to adapt training to the needs of workers (as stipulated in the construction collective agreement) is facilitating the assistance to Spanish courses to improve their understanding of the language and, consequently, the content of training courses in the company.

In any case, it has been common the situation in which foreign workers (mostly Pakistanis and some Moroccans) did not understand the content of the courses on Occupational Health and Safety. Likewise, the information about Health and Safety issues distributed around the building is in Catalan, making it even more difficult to understand for foreigners.

3.2. Committee Demands

The Committee highly appreciates the social efforts of the company, which prioritizes the inclusion of immigrants and other groups in the labour market more than the economic benefits. For this reason, they point out that all demands made by the Committee must always be considering the nature of the company. Even so, they have considered the possibility that the information materials on Occupational Health and Safety to be also delivered in Arabic and other languages to facilitate the understanding and to minimize the risk of accidents due to lack of information.

Also, the Committee (CS2 and CS5) emphasizes the ties between the linguistic diversity and the cultural diversity. Thus, the management of schedules during the period of Ramadan is one of the points of conflict with the Management. The Committee have repeatedly requested to adapt schedules of Muslim workers during the forty days of Ramadan to check out before (always not interfering the goals of the company). However, they assume that this initiative could create rejection among native workers. In that vein, the Management believes that if they approve this initiative, "everyone would want the same".

II. CASE STUDY SUMMARY | CONTACT CENTERS

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CONTACT-CENTER SECTOR

The contact-center industry is one of the economic activities that best demonstrate the impact of globalization and information technology on the labour market (Aneesh, 2015). The sector is immersed in outsourcing business practices at global level, providing to other services organizations their customer services and sales operations. In that sense, the existence of multiple language environments in the sector is normal.

The 9.9% of workers in the sector in Spain are foreigners¹. Likewise, it is a female sector (61.7% women) and also young (50% is 35 years or less). Most professional categories of the sector are medium-skilled (86.4%), with a large presence of the figure of “Call Agent”. Regarding the type of contract, temporary are majority (50.5%), as well as part-time days (47.9%). Low and lower-middle wages are also general (53.2%). Therefore, we speak about workers with short trajectories in their companies, where there is a high turnover.

It is also relevant to highlight that the current sectoral collective agreement (“Collective agreement at State level of contact center industry”, 2012) includes in the Article 46 a wage bonus for those workers “that is required for the development of their activity the use of one or more foreign languages”. Furthermore, this agreement emphasizes in the Article 86 the “principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination in terms of sex, marital status, age, race, nationality, social status, religious or political ideas, affiliation or not to unions as well as for reasons of language within the Spanish State”.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE COMPANY (CALLSOLUTIONS)

2.1. Characteristics of the Company

CallSolutions is an American multinational focused on the business of contact-center with more than 64,000 employees worldwide. In Spain they have four offices: two in Seville, one in Madrid and one in Barcelona (4.000 employees approximately). 750 of them are in the Barcelona hub, been the 70% women. The average age is 33 years. As for education level there is a big difference between the national campaigns and the multilingual campaigns. In national campaigns, educational level is basic. But in

¹ Data from the “Muestra Continua de Vidas Laborales” (2011). Not available more recent years. Only database available to filter specific sub-sectors such as Contact-center.

multilingual campaigns work people coming from their country (many of them to study in Barcelona), so the 70% are graduates.

The difference in Barcelona regarding the headquarters of the rest of the world is its nature as multilingual hub. That is, the company invests in Barcelona due to the diversity of the city, trying to bring clients at multilingual level. The 45% of the Barcelona office workers are from different countries in Europe (the most of them are from France and Italy). CS1 (HR Manager) explains this fact as "an issue of cost and because Barcelona is primarily one of the European cities that is economically cheaper to have a multilingual person working, but also the staff is native, unlike other cheaper cities like Belgrade or Lisbon", all aspects that are valued by many customers. Speaking about customers, the Barcelona hub provides services to a diverse range of sectors: Automotive, Banking, Insurance, Retail, Electronics and High Tech, Media, Health Services, Transportation, etc. The type of service provided to customers in Barcelona is especially customer-care.

Regarding the working conditions of the workers, the HR Manager ensures that the contact-center industry has very tight margins and very high wage costs that do not allow a lot of flexibility, having practically nothing more to offer than a salary based on the collective agreement. "What does it imply? We have a high mobility in those profiles, they leave frequently and while they are here, the level of demanding to the company is very high, so the dissatisfaction of those people working with us is also high" (CS1: HR Manager). In that sense, the level of rotation within the company is high and the average of the period staying in the company is three years. Most of the contracts of call agents are fixed-term, these linked to the continuity of the agreement between the Company and the client for a campaign of customer services. In the case that a campaign ends and start working on another, the employees are fired and rehired after one week (CC3). There are also cases of permanent contracts once the agents exceed a period of years, but the sustainability of these contracts are linked equally to the term of the customer - supplier relationship.

It is also relevant to emphasize the organization of the architecture and the space. The building of *CallSolutions* in Barcelona has six floors. The first one is dedicated to administration and support departments, where is HR. Each of the other floors is entirely dedicated to the projects developed for a single customer. Thus, for example, in the fourth plant all employees are dedicated to an electronic products client. Also, workers at each plant are also divided spatially by origin, with the only common link of the Project Manager.

2.2. Languages and relationships at work

HR Manager considers the presence of multilingualism and cultural diversity in the company an element of personal enrichment: "[...] we are working with German, with English, with Dutch, with French, with Italians, Spaniards, with Catalan... [...] That enriches you only with the treatment that each one requires you culturally". However, the way in which national teams are divided in most of the departments does not facilitate interaction between workers of different nationalities.

In part, it is a reason of size that the agents are divided in national teams. That facilitates to agents a complete immersion in the language when they arrive at work so customers perceive a completely native language use. "If agents are not native, the customers are generally distrustful". That's the reason this division of national teams (as well as all been natives) is mostly a requirement of the client (the company contracting *CallSolutions* services). This type of dynamic is transferred at social and personal level. HR acknowledge that "normally there are ghettos" (CC1), but arguing it as the consequence of their "idiomatic affinity" and because they are "culturally equal". The same arguments of one of the interviewees (CC4), stating that "when you're abroad is normal to talk more with someone from your country. You fit more with that person. It's easier to express yourself". Anyway, she acknowledges that "there is not much time to talk with others".

In any case, all workers interviewed recognize that the language they use is mostly Italian (his native language) not only with customers, but with their colleagues. Team coordinators are also generally of the same nationality, reinforcing these dynamics. There is, therefore, a process of creation of "cultural and linguistic bubbles" to reproduce habits, expressions and interpretations of the original country of workers, Italy in this case.

However, there is a smaller department in the company in comparison to the rest dedicated to the services of a flight booking website. All nationalities are mixed, distributed indifferently, because the client does not require otherwise. The interviewee CS3 works there during the six months of spring and summer. He recognizes that there is a better environment and greater interaction with workers of other nationalities than in the department of the electronics product client (where he works during autumn and winter). "At the other department they are much stricter. They want us to speak only Italian among us. [...] In this department the Spanish is spoken more among us". Thus, greater interaction between foreign and local workers is established.

2.3. Understanding the labour rights

The official languages of the company in Barcelona are English and Spanish, although the Spanish is not a requirement to work as call agent. However, the HR Manager recognizes that the language used to talk to them is Spanish and even the employment contract is only in Spanish. For that reason, the HR team dedicates "all the time they need to understand it". Due to that, all the members of HR Department assist to English lessons. However, the Committee member interviewed (CC2) ensures that on several occasions some workers have consulted him because they did not understand the Spanish of the HR documents. "The fundamental problem of language barriers is not the understanding among colleagues at work. It is about understanding the rights of every employee "(CC2). In that sense, one of the workers interviewed (CC3) says that "workers do not necessarily need the Spanish to work, but to interact and to defend your rights well in the company is necessary".

HR Manager recognizes that some foreign workers create more problems than natives in the recognition of their rights. For example, she states that "the Germans are very demanding and distrustful signing the contract because they do not understand the law" and "the French are very unionists" (CC1). However, some workers suggest lack of transparency from HR to understand their rights (CC3 and CC4) and even practices of mobbing and harassment (CC5). In these situations, workers seek help for a better understanding of their rights in their colleagues (CC3) and members of the Committee (CC4 and CC5), preferable if they are from the same country. All workers interviewed have come to the committee of the company to seek advice on their labour rights: maternity rights (CC4), schedule changes (CC3) and mobbing (CC5).

2.5. Representation, representativeness and multilingualism

In the committee there is a relative correlation between the majority of women in the company (70%) and the Committee (55%). However, it doesn't happen so with foreign workers: while in the company they are the 45% of the workforce, in the Committee are only 4 of 16 members, two of them from Spanish-speaker countries. The other two are French and Italian.

The Committee member interviewed (CC2) does not make a bad assessment of this issue. Committee members try always to communicate with workers not only in Spanish but also in English. However, he acknowledges that "the fact of having an Italian delegate makes it easier to contact with the Italian colleagues. And with the French member of the Committee is the same". Thus, both the French and Italian workers mainly consult to the representative of their nationality.

Also, the Committee member interviewed recognizes that the language can be a barrier to employees' participation in the Committee or even to ask for their services. "Sometimes it is not just a language issue, but cultural. At first I understood every word they were saying, but not the meaning, which can lead to misunderstandings" (CC2). For many foreign workers who are fluent in Spanish, these cultural barriers make employees to consult mostly to members of their own nationality.

Only one of the workers interviewed is affiliated to some union. The other two recognize that cultural barriers are not important in this regard, but the perception of futility of the union. Committee members are generally call agents without any training in labour legislation (CC3 and CC4). "For most of the questions are not prepared," says CC4, while CC3 considered that "to spend 35 euros every three months to get advice on issues that I can search on internet does not make sense". However, the Committee put in value the role of the union, insisting they are the fundamental tool to prevent workers to sign their contracts without deep knowledge of its content. For this, the Committee regularly hands out informational flyers about labour rights in both English and Spanish.

2.6. Comparison with other Multilingual Contact-Center in Barcelona

During the development of the field work, there have been three interviews in another contact-center in Barcelona to use it as a comparative element. This company has a high proportion of foreign workers (90%). The rotation of the workplace is also high, having renewed more than half of the workforce in the past year. The labour disputes with HR regarding situations of deceit in the content of contracts (always in Spanish) seem common. Moreover, teams generally tend to a greater mix of nationalities being spatially distributed for reasons more linked to functions within departments. Likewise, the required level of English of workers to enter in the company is very high, so that interaction in English between workers of different nationalities is fluid. This generates greater sociability but also situations of not learning Spanish, making it difficult to adapt to life and environment of the city.

3. INITIATIVES AND POLICIES TO DEAL WITH MULTILINGUALISM

3.1. Training and Management of diversity initiatives

The company places great emphasis on continuous learning of its call agents. Once *CallSolutions* start a project with a client, the company performs massive recruitment

campaigns. Prior to joining their jobs, new employees assist extensive training full time for a month from Monday to Friday on technical content of the product or customer service as well as the philosophy of the client to adapt to their ways and uses for, ultimately, act as part of the organizational of the client (in this process is important to use a methodology called Lean 6 Sigma to align the goals of *CallSolutions* and the client's). In these courses, all new employees of each campaign are formed uniformly, regardless of origin, so the courses are in English. "To train everyone in their language is unaffordable" says HR Manager.

Beyond training, the company has a program called 'Enjoy *CallSolutions*' to organize quarterly leisure activities outside the work environment to make employees fraternize between campaigns and between countries. However, HR Manager recognizes that the true socialization among employees occurs after working hours in the nearby bars, where usually the relationships are between people of the same nationality. The average age of employees (young) and their relative recent arrival in the city facilitate these relationships outside of work.

3.2. Committee Demands

The Committee suggests that in recent years (from the crisis) has been a qualitative change in training. "Before the training was periodical to update us. But now, for example, I have not any training for more than two years ago". Circumstance generating scenarios in which the information that agents give to customers about the products is collected on the Internet, instead of direct information. Similarly, CC2 (Committee) also indicates a greater "Taylorism" of the work processes in which the amount of calls overlaps the quality and resolution in response to the client.

Regarding the translation of contracts, the member of the Committee interviewed understands that it would be a complicated initiative, as it should be done for all languages of foreign workers in the company. Likewise, it should be done professionally by translators, increasing costs. The Committee insists, on the contrary, that is the Committee itself that will facilitate the understanding of legal documents in the company.

III. CASE STUDY SUMMARY | IT STARTUPS

1. OVERVIEW OF THE IT START-UPS IN BARCELONA

Barcelona is becoming today a cradle for business projects focused on different technological developments, getting gradually a city of reference for start-ups, although Spain is ranked No. 13 in the ranking of European countries for the generation and promotion of start-ups (Osimo, 2016). The economic activities mainly developed by this network of start-ups are B2B (business-to-business), e-commerce and mobile development². That generates a range of attractive jobs for qualified profiles worldwide within the IT sector. Therefore, it is usual the presence of different nationalities, languages and cultures in those work environments (there are no precise statistics on the type of employment that exists in the field of start-ups). In that sense, it is relevant to address how linguistic diversity is managed in one Barcelona's start-ups that may reflect different relevant organizational aspects.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE COMPANY (ITProject)

2.1. Characteristics of the company

ITProject is an IT Start-up focused on the development of an online communication and collaboration platform that provides a single place for collaborative tasks, discussions, file sharing, group chat and video conferencing. The main objective of the platform is to get easier, more flexible and to optimize the performance of other organizations, thus minimizing the use of mail to communicate with colleagues, customers and suppliers.

The company was funded practically in a garage of Barcelona by three IT developers in 2008 and currently has 43 people in its office of Barcelona, counting now also with its headquarters in California. There are 14 different nationalities (Germany, Poland, UK, Portugal, Italy, Estonia, Lithuania, Russia, Cyprus, India and Canada). Last year the company increased with 12 new people, most of them computer developers. The average age is about 30 years (25-35 years) and most are men (just 5 women working now). "We would like to recruit more women, but it's difficult to find women with computing profiles" (HR responsible: IT1).

² Barcelona Startup Map (2016): <http://w153.bcn.cat/#/>

The collective agreement applied to the company is the Offices Agreement (2009). However, the HR responsible affirms that "the company is more flexible than the agreement: with the schedules, the days of vacation, the sick leaves ... There are many people who when they are sick work from home".

Barcelona office is located in an attic where the space is completely open. There are no walls except two meeting rooms where the walls are glasses. On one side, it is concentrated IT developers (mostly Spanish). In the other side of the Office are located the others teams as Sales Operations, Customer Services, Product Design, Human Resources and Billing (where foreigners are majority). The tables are long and shared. The office has sofas (where developers can also work with laptops), a ping-pong table (also used as a meeting table) and a large kitchen that connects to the terrace. The space illustrates a sense of horizontality and flexibility in the organization of work, confirmed by all interviewees: "We are a company that has a lot of flexibility" (IT1). This flexibility is conceived as a motivator for workers: "The most freedom and flexibility you give people more, the most responsibility they assume with their jobs". Issues correlated with the characteristics of start-ups: "What I love about start-ups model is that people are really motivated and they really like what they do. In a big company this usually doesn't happen".

The IT industry is very dynamic, but this type of environments decreases the effect of rotation: "The workforce has changed a lot. They got a very demanding profile and there are many companies that pay much more than us. But we have such good atmosphere that this motivates them to stay. [...] A friend who works here told me: 'I get offers every week but more money for more stress doesn't compensate me'".

2.2. Company Culture and Collaborative

It is relevant to point out how the company culture is defined: "We are a very open company at communication level; very transparent in the way the financial information is transmitted by the CEO; and very horizontal, no hierarchy, all are workmates" (IT1). There is also an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship highlighted by all interviewees. Thus, in the recruitment processes they take care that new workers fit with this company culture.

The idea is to have "a collaborative environment resolving problems. Thus, the workers must have the tools to solve problems themselves" (IT1). In that sense, one of the key initiatives of the company is the 'Culture Club'. In the company, one of the elements that most concern is the cultural, geographical and time gap between the office of Barcelona and San Francisco (where other functions related to management are developed). "It is normal that we do not understand each other 100%" (IT1). To

improve that issue the company has created the project 'culture club': meetings every two weeks (or per month) in which one person from each team assists to propose improvement ideas of all kind: proposals to improve the work environment, ideas to facilitate communication between the two offices, etc. These meetings are video conferences using the platform that they developed. In the case of the Barcelona office, they have a space dedicated only for these videoconferences, where a screen in the wall works as an extension of the space, giving the impression that both offices are closer.

2.3. Languages Courses

One of the main proposals emerging from the 'Culture Club' has been the organization of language courses in the office once a week during working hours. Initially, it emerged to improve the English of the Spanish workers and to improve communication within the team. Then, it was also implemented French, German, Spanish (various levels) and even Catalan (as a way to integrate more foreign workers in the local culture) (IT1 and IT3). All interviewees attend to these lessons they all appreciate positively this initiative. Besides, the company was funded in Barcelona, but "no one is learning Spanish in the US office" (IT1). That is an issue that may profoundly improve the feedback (IT1). That is, organizational and innovative resolutions seeking to improve communication between the two offices may be easier learning Spanish in the office of California.

2.4. Languages and relationships at work

The company official language is English. "Our main customer is in the US" justifies IT2 (Manager of Customer Success). All communication across the interface is in English. However, the IT developers usually speak each other in Spanish or Catalan (IT1). Some interviewees perceive this as an opportunity to improve their Spanish learned in their Spanish lessons: "It's good the cultural exchange in the company. The developers (the most of them Spanish) learn English speaking with us (the other departments) and we do learn Spanish speaking with them" (IT2).

However, for workers newly arrived from the Office of San Francisco can be problematic (IT5, Indian grew up in USA): My interactions are 100% in English but [...] there are three guys in my team who are from here and they speak Catalan each other. [...] Sometimes they prefer to talk in Spanish or Catalan to discuss. [...] There is no problem. But it's preferable to have conversations in English to make decisions together". In that sense, the language courses are also a mechanism to solve problems more fluently in such scenarios. "So that's why I'm trying to learn Spanish: to understand a little bit more. In that sense, they can talk in Spanish and I can take it".

Similar situation to others interviewees (IT4, UK): "When some workmates are talking in Spanish ... you know ... I can understand something, but I just try to not intervene. I cannot give an adequate response". Therefore, we observe a certain preponderance of the uses of Spanish and Catalan among developers and English among the other teams, as well as a linguistic gap for those who dominate only one of the two languages.

In that sense, the Manager of Customer Support (IT3) argues that the company "has a natural way to deal with multilingualism" (IT2), so justifying the lack of a company policy about this issue beyond the consideration of English as the official language. It is true that the language courses are an important way to improve communication within a predominantly multilingual staff. In that sense, "it's very useful to speak several languages in this company" (IT3).

An example of this flexibility and adaptability in the use of languages is illustrated by the cases when some of the workers show pro-activity in learning Spanish: "We change to English automatically if there is a person who does not understand. Unless there are people who want to learn Spanish, but they are not yet ready to speak. Then we speak Spanish-English "(IT3).

2.5. Understanding the labour rights | Representation, representativeness and multilingualism

The employment contract signed by all workers is delivered to workers in Spanish. There is also a corporate contract of the company in English. The head of HR says that if there is a worker who does not speak Spanish, she explains the time required. It is the case of a British worker interviewed without knowledge of Spanish (IT2), who recognizes that he didn't read the contract at all. He explains that he is confident with the company as well as with his teammates both foreigners but with domain of the Spanish (IT2 and IT3).

Other worker with difficulties understanding the Spanish (IT5) recognizes that the most problematic for him is the administrative paperwork to fulfil once arrived to Barcelona. In that sense, workmates and a professional hired to intermediate have helped him. "This happens to many people who come from the American office to here. Always there is someone nice to help you". This type of host informal practices at work reinforces the sense of collaboration in the office.

For those foreign workers who fully understand the Spanish, the challenge is not so much idiomatic but for lack of knowledge of the Spanish labour laws (IT3), for example, to understand the salary contributions. In that case, the help is seek in the internal and external HR services of the company (IT3). Also, the interviewee IT3 recognizes that "if I had a problem, I may go to a union", but arguing that there are no

problems at the company and, when some misunderstanding rises, it is resolved quickly. So happened with a wage unfulfilled promise when he was hired, which was resolved satisfactorily with a quick conversation with his manager. In general, workers interviewed recognize that they don't perceive themselves as "employees who have to fight for their rights" (IT4). The company is horizontal, decisions are transparent, working conditions seem optimal. Therefore, the possibility of an environment to need the organization of a committee seems improbable.

3. INITIATIVES AND POLICIES TO DEAL WITH THE MULTILINGUALISM

Language courses are probably the main initiative implemented in the company to manage linguistic diversity in the workplace. However, it seems relevant to highlight other organizational issues.

3.1. *Scrum Methodology*

ITProject uses a work process methodology common in technological Start-ups: 'Scrum', is a process to apply good practices to work collaboratively with the client during the development of a product that suits the needs of the client, programming by the platform collaboratively. This process counts with a Product Owner (Client), the Team (IT Developers) and a Scrum Master (person managing the implementation of the Scrum method). In that way, the PO decides the importance of the steps (projects) to be performed. They establish a calendar to set that step and a demo is showed to present the project. The PO determines what is needed for the final product and the team decides what to do in each phase. The so-called sprint (the final development process) is then performed. The whole process has gaming issues using certain rules. Thus at the end of the process, a retrospective is done observing the scores for each phase.

The interesting point about this methodology is the global character that adopts these meetings to implement the phases of the Scrum method. Part of the office becomes a global screen which hosts customers from different parts of the world, as well as members of the company which are divided between the offices in California and Barcelona, as well as other developers who connect from home.

3.2. *Offsite Activities*

One element highlighted as very positive by all the interviewees is the organization leisure activities out of the office. For example, the company organize once a lunch out

of Barcelona with a 'paella' competition that serves to introduce foreigners in the local culture. "It was very helpful to do more Spanish things together. [...] It's very helpful for the foreigners to do offsite activities that involve the local culture", recognizes one of the foreign workers (IT5). During these activities, the workmates speak "work issues, but relaxed. It works as team-building (IT3). It serves as facilitator event to build relationships. "These activities are ice-breakers. It helps to those who are from different countries to talk more each other" (IT3). Also, this type of environment is reproduced in the office, where sometimes they organize meals together where each one brings prepared food from home to share with everyone.

CONCLUSIONS

As we already discussed, the concept of Diversity Management allows studying the language issue more broadly: the language and forms of expression, structuration of various dimensions of culture, ethnicity, and poverty situations associated with certain migratory flows. In that sense, it is enlightening to observe how certain labor conflicts appear in contexts with a higher presence of workers with important religious differences and whose networks and paths are marked more by precariousness. The negotiations between Moroccan workers and the Management in *ActiveBrick* for a greater adaptability of the schedules during the days of Ramadan is a scenario not observed in other cases. Likewise, qualifications and age dimensions often tend to reduce this type of scenario, as we saw in the case of the IT startup.

It is equally important to highlight the role of intermediary that the committees plays within these organizations. The transfer of certain demands would be difficult otherwise for many reasons such as the lack of language understanding or the ignorance of the labor regulations of the country. In that sense, it seems very relevant the proper correspondence between the proportion and diversity of migrants in the company and its representation on the committee. Thus, the contact-center case illustrates an unfortunate representation of the linguistic and cultural diversity in the hub. By contrast, the case of construction seems to work properly in that direction, and so is reflected in the use and consideration of the Committee for migrant workers.

Also, the problem of linguistic diversity management must be addressed intersecting the whole company. Thus, it is important to consider the approach of managers, HR departments and middle managers. The attitudes of the managers interviewed are diverse: assimilationist positions of the Manager of the construction company; integrative and conciliatory approaches with the managers of the IT Startup; and cohabitation strategies between languages and cultures in discourse and practices of the HR Manager of the contact-center company.

Finally, it is relevant to highlight the issue of training. Only in the case of contact-center we observed intermittent initiatives to adapt the language of the training to the language of workers. That can be risky in the case of the construction company if we take in consideration the transmission of information about health and safety issues. The organization of training courses in the case of the IT Startup shows a proactive attitude towards enrichment involving the linguistic and cultural diversity in organizations. The high qualification and the small size of the company enable this type of dynamics. It would be interesting to facilitate the launch of these initiatives in different sectors, companies and occupations where the labor intensive and the lack of flexibility impede a proper management of diversity.

Interviewees List

CASE STUDY I: ActiveBrick

POSITION	CODE	DESCRIPTION	NATIONALITY
Manager	CS1	Construction Division - Manager	Spanish
Committee	CS2	Driver Committee Member - (Responsible of Working Risk Issues)	Spanish
Worker 1	CS3	Plumber	Moroccan
Worker 2	CS4	Painter	Moroccan
Worker 3	CS5	Painter President of the Workers Committee	Moroccan

CASE STUDY II: CallSolutions

POSITION	CODE	DESCRIPTION	NATIONALITY
Manager	CC1	Manager of HR Department	Spanish
Committee	CC2	Member of the Committee Customer Services Officer	Italian
Worker 1	CC3	Customer Services Officer (G)	Italian
Worker 2	CC4	Customer Services Officer (V)	Italian
Worker 3	CC5	Customer Services Officer (M)	Italian

Company of comparison:

POSITION	DESCRIPTION	NATIONALITY
Manager	HR Department Recruiter	English
Worker 1	Telemarketer	Belgian
Worker 2	Telemarketer	Dutch

CASE STUDY III: ITProject

POSITION	CODE	DESCRIPTION	NATIONALITY
Manager	IT1	Manager of Customer Support	German
Manager	IT2	Chief of HR and Billing	Polish
Worker	IT3	Customer Success Officer	Portuguese
Worker	IT4	Customer Support Officer	English
Manager	IT5	Product Management	India-USA

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