
INSTITUTO
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M

MASTER'S IN INTERCULTURAL STUDIES FOR BUSINESS

Intercultural Competence and Operational Risk in International Trade:

An Internship at Venture Vanguard

Carolina Guedes de Andrade

07/2026

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Carolina Guedes de Andrade

**Internship Report submitted to Instituto Superior de Contabilidade
e Administração do Porto to obtain the Master's degree in
Intercultural Studies for Business, under the supervision of
Professor Sandra Patrícia Marques Ribeiro**

Dedication

To my guardian angel, Nito. There's not a day that goes by without missing you.
Thank you for continuing to guide me; you brought me out of the dark.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Venture Vanguard for the opportunity to intern at the company that made me grow more than ever in such a short time, and that I can now call my full-time job. A special appreciation to Eng. Ana Rodrigues and to Susana Pedro for the opportunity and for pushing me.

To my supervisor, Professor Sandra, to whom I made a promise and postponed it, thank you for your energy, advice, and support. You made me feel like I wasn't doing this alone and made me stop being terrified.

I would like to thank my mother, the person who made me the woman that I am today. You constantly push me to be better, even with all the adversities of life; your strength keeps me going, and I will forever catch you. To my father, the person who pushes me to jump, I will always cherish your advice and be your little girl. This report and this master's are, most of all, ours, mine, and yours. To my sister, you opened the door for me, and I will forever ensure that I make you proud. Your leap of faith gave me light and confidence, and for that, I will always be thankful. To my brother, I hope you fly as high as you can. To Henrique, thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader, even far, you're always present. To my grandma Irene, thank you for listening to all my points of view and all the debates. In some part, you are all that pushes me every day to become better and to make you proud.

Lastly, to my Zé, this wouldn't have been possible without you. You pushed, disciplined, and inspired me; you were my companion in every step of this report. For all the advice, the reprimands, and all the "só mais uma página", this is ours. You're my calm in every storm and my certainty in everything unknown. I love you endlessly.

Abstract:

The present internship report explores how intercultural communication helps reduce operational risk and enhance supplier communication, using Venture Vanguard's operations as a practical case study. In the 21st century, companies increasingly operate across borders, making intercultural competence essential for effective communication and business success. Venture Vanguard is an international trade company that operates in a deeply intercultural environment while ensuring OMATAPALO Group's needs for its multiple projects, specializing in procurement, purchasing, logistics, and exports. This internship report combines a theoretical framework focused on intercultural communication and competence with knowledge from the Master's in Intercultural Studies for Business and includes a qualitative analysis of real-world scenarios from the internship. The findings suggest that intercultural competence is a crucial factor in minimizing misunderstandings and ensuring successful operations in international trade, as witnessed during the internship through the analysis of routine documentation and email exchanges, and in documented incident cases where adapting communication practices reduced delays and order corrections.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication; Intercultural Competence; International Trade; Operational risk; Business communication; Supplier Management

Resumo:

Este relatório de estágio analisa de que forma a comunicação e as competências interculturais contribuem para a redução do risco operacional e para o reforço da comunicação com fornecedores, tendo como estudo de caso prático as operações da Venture Vanguard. No século XXI, as empresas operam cada vez mais além das fronteiras, tornando a comunicação e a competências interculturais essenciais para uma comunicação eficaz e para o sucesso empresarial. A Venture Vanguard, empresa especializada em comércio internacional, atua num contexto profundamente intercultural, assegurando as necessidades do Grupo OMATAPALO para a multiplicidade de projetos que desenvolve, especializando-se em *procurement*, compras, logística e exportação. Este relatório de estágio articula o enquadramento teórico sobre cultura e competências interculturais com os conhecimentos adquiridos no Mestrado em Estudos Interculturais para os Negócios, complementando-os com uma análise qualitativa de experiências reais vivenciadas durante o estágio. Os resultados demonstram que a comunicação e as competências interculturais são fatores determinantes para minimizar mal-entendidos e garantir o cumprimento das operações neste contexto, conforme evidenciado durante o estágio, pela análise de documentação de rotina e das trocas de e-mails, bem como por vários incidentes documentados, nos quais a adaptação das práticas comunicacionais reduziu atrasos e correções à encomenda.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação Intercultural, Competências interculturais; Comércio internacional; Risco operacional; Comunicação Empresarial; Gestão de fornecedores

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Abbreviations

NEI – Nota de Encomenda Internacional

NE1 – Nota de Encomenda Marítima

NE2 – Nota de Encomenda Aérea

BL – Bill of Lading (Conhecimento de Embarque Marítimo)

AWB – Air Waybill (Conhecimento de Transporte Aéreo)

EXW – Exworks Incoterm (2020) (À saída da Fábrica)

FCA – Free Carrier Incoterm (2020) (Franco Transportador)

FOB – Free on Board Incoterm (2020) (Franco a Bordo)

CIF – Cost, Insurance and Freight Incoterm (2020) (Custo, Seguro e Frete)

CIP – Carriage and Insurance Paid to Incoterm (2020) (Transporte e Seguro pagos até)

ARCCLA – Agência Reguladora de Certificação de Carga e Logística de Angola

INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly globalized world and economy of the 21st century, international trade has become a fundamental driver of economic development, enabling the exchange of goods and services beyond national borders. This growing interconnection has also increased the complexity of business operations, especially in areas such as logistics, financial transactions, regulatory compliance, and intercultural communication, as companies engaged in international trade must manage their operations efficiently and navigate the diverse cultural environment of the global market.

This report was developed within the scope of the Master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business and on the internship carried out on Venture Vanguard, an international trade company that operates as an intermediary between international suppliers and the OMATAPALO Group, an engineering and construction group in Angola. Venture Vanguard, a branch of the organization, is responsible for the procurement, purchasing, logistics, and export processes for all the international purchases required by OMATAPALO AO.

This internship report adopts a qualitative case study approach, drawing on practical experience gained during the internship at Venture Vanguard to understand the relationship among intercultural communication, intercultural competence, operational risk, and supplier communication within Venture Vanguard's international trade operations. This report, therefore, has three main objectives. The first is to describe Venture Vanguard's role in the international procurement, purchase, and export process for OMATAPALO. Secondly, it intends to analyse the intercultural challenges observed and experienced in supplier communication, documentation, and process negotiation. Finally, it discusses how the tasks developed during the internship may have contributed to the company's international business communication.

The methodology combines participant observation within Venture Vanguard's procurement-to-export workflow and structured qualitative analysis of intercultural communication incidents. The analysis is based on supplier and client interactions (emails, meetings, and documents) involving international partners for purchase orders. The observed period covers from February of 2025 to the end of May of 2025. Data sources include routine operational documentation (such as purchase orders, invoices/

quotations/proforma invoices, export and shipping documents), emails, and personal notes taken during meetings with the suppliers. All documents and data were explicitly approved by the company for academic use under the internship agreement. It is also important to note that the incidents discussed in the present report were selected according to particular criteria: the presence of intercultural cues, operational impact, and traceability in the personal notes. Participant observations are supported by a review of relevant literature on international trade as an intercultural practice, intercultural communication and competence, international business communication, and operational risk management.

The report is organized into five main chapters. The first chapter presents a theoretical reflection on international trade and the role of these companies in today's world. The second chapter describes OMATAPALO and highlights the company's importance to Angola's continued development, particularly given its close collaboration with the government. The third chapter focuses on Venture Vanguard and presents the company's organizational structure and workflow. The fourth chapter intends to connect theory and practice. It discusses intercultural communication and intercultural competence, and their role in international trade. It also addresses the challenges that arise within a company like Venture Vanguard. Lastly, the fifth chapter presents a reflection on the internship experience, detailing the tasks performed and the skills developed. Chapter five also describes and discusses the selected critical incidents.

As a whole, this report aims to provide an understanding of how international trade operations are managed in a particular context and practice and the relevance of intercultural communication and competence in a globalized, interconnected world.

Chapter I – Theoretical Framework of International Trade

1.1 International trade as an intercultural business practice

International trade, as an intercultural business practice, refers to the cross-border exchange of goods, services, and capital among economic actors located in different national markets. It is a fundamental dimension of globalization and plays a central role in connecting economies, enabling specialization and promoting international economic interdependence.

International trade can be conceptualized as an intercultural practice because it is structured by constant interactions between actors whose professional conduct, communication patterns and expectations are shaped by distinct cultural frameworks. In this sense, cross-border trade cannot be reduced to the simple exchange of goods, services or capital, it must be understood as a process of negotiation between different systems of meaning, behaviour and business mindset across cultures (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

Rather than reducing international commerce to purely economic transactions, these perspectives highlight how cultural factors interact with legal, logistical, and market dynamics, making intercultural competence a relevant dimension for effective communication and cooperation in cross-border business. It's inherently a culturally mediated practice in which intercultural competence becomes essential for effective communication, mutual understanding, and sustainable business cooperation.

National cultural models such as those proposed by Hofstede, Hall, and Trompenaars are used in this report as sensitising frameworks rather than as deterministic explanations of individual behaviour. They may help identify questions concerning hierarchy, uncertainty, time, explicitness, and relationship-building, but they cannot establish how a particular supplier or employee will communicate. Holliday (2019) and Holliday et al. (2021) caution against reducing culture to fixed national characteristics and instead emphasise the situated, negotiated, and multiple nature of cultural identity. Dervin and Gross (2016) similarly approach intercultural competence as context-dependent, reflexive, and dynamic. Accordingly, the analysis in this report gives priority to the specific transaction, organisational procedures,

professional roles, previous interactions, and the communication evidence observed during the internship.

1.2 Intercultural communication and competence as an operational capability

Intercultural communication is the interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds, and intercultural competence is the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enables effective and appropriate communication in such contexts (ArasaratnamSmith, 2017; Koester & Lustig, 2015). Intercultural competence, thus, refers to the capacity to engage with cultural diversity in ways that support mutual understanding, effective communication and appropriate interactions. In a business context, it means being able to work with international partners, suppliers and clients without letting the cultural differences create unnecessary confusion, risk or conflict that result in operational problems and put the operation at risk (Bennett, 2004; Deardorff, 2006).

In organizations that operate in cross-border operations, the ability to interpret cultural differences, adapt communication styles and respond appropriately to the different professional situations has a direct impact in operational efficiency and continuity. Being specific, intercultural competence enables clearer supplier communication, alignment of expectations about documentation and deadlines, reduce the times for needed clarification and lead to a more effective negotiation and coordination across culturally diverse contexts (Bennett, 2004; Deardorff, 2006). From this perspective, it functions as an operational capability: a practical resource that is naturally embedded in the day-to-day workflow that helps prevent avoidable misunderstandings, reduce delays and supports a more reliable decision-making process under time and cost limitations.

This understanding is reinforced by Milton Bennett's view of competence as the progressive ability to move beyond ethnocentric perspectives and adapt to difference - the base of his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity - and by Darla Deardorff's definition that integrates attitudes, knowledge and skills leading to appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural situations. Together, these

approaches justify treating intercultural competence not merely as interpersonal sensitivity but as a concrete promoter of communication quality and risk mitigation in international trade operations.

Both of these perspectives make it possible to view intercultural competence as a strategic and operational asset rather than a purely abstract or interpersonal quality. In the context of intercultural commerce, intercultural competence is an essential capability that strengthens communication and helps reduce operational risks associated with misunderstandings, misalignments, and cultural differences.

1.3 Trust and supplier relationships

Trust is a fundamental element in supplier relationships, particularly in international commerce, where cooperation depends on effective communication across cultural differences. In global trade, trust supports continued partnerships, reduces uncertainty, and facilitates smoother coordination between business partners (Adler, 2008; Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). It is especially important in supplier relationships, since these often require long-term collaboration, mutual reliability, and the ability to manage expectations on both sides despite differences in language, business conduct, and decision-making practices. For this reason, trust should not be understood as a purely personal matter, but as a relational dimension shaped by cultural norms and professional interaction, as demonstrated by Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars, and Nancy Adler.

Hofstede's dimensions offer a broad comparative vocabulary for considering how expectations concerning hierarchy, uncertainty, and individual or collective responsibility may influence business relationships. However, these dimensions describe aggregate tendencies and should not be used to infer how a particular supplier will behave solely on the basis of nationality. In the present report, trust is therefore analysed through the supplier's organisational procedures, history of interaction, contractual position, and observed communication, while national-cultural models are used only as a possible contextual reference. This approach recognises that professional behaviour is shaped by multiple and intersecting factors rather than by nationality alone (Holliday, 2019; Dervin & Gross, 2016).

In “Riding the Waves of Culture”, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) highlight that business relationships are shaped by different cultural approaches to rules, obligations, and interpersonal ties. Their distinction between universalism and particularism is relevant to supplier relations as it shows that some cultures place a greater emphasis on formal agreements and standardized procedures, while others rely more on personal trust and situational flexibility. The work also points to the influence of time orientation and relationship patterns in shaping expectations of responsiveness, commitment, and mutual obligation between commercial partners.

Nancy Adler builds on this concept in her work “International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour” (2008) by emphasizing that international management requires recognizing cultural diversity as a central factor in organizational relationships. She shows that effective cross-cultural management depends on understanding how values and communication practices influence cooperation, conflict resolution, and partnership development. In supplier relationships, this means that trust is built not only through contractual performance, but also through culturally appropriate interactions, respect for differences, and the ability to maintain and grow working relationships over time.

By combining these three authors, we can see how trust in supplier relationships is culturally mediated and crucial to the success of international business operations. In this sense, building trust with suppliers requires more than efficient procedures; it also demands intercultural awareness, adaptability, and sensitivity to how professionalism, commitment, and reliability are understood across cultures.

1.4 Documentation and terminology as intercultural risk areas

In international commerce, documentation and commercial terminology represent a significant intercultural risk area because their interpretation is not always as neutral or universal as it may appear. Although trade documentation is designed to standardize transactions, how terms, obligations, and procedural expectations are understood can still vary across cultural contexts. As a result, misunderstandings may arise not only from language differences but also from differing assumptions about clarity, formality, responsibility, and the meaning of the requested documents. In this sense,

documentation in international commerce should be understood not only as an administrative requirement but also as an intercultural interaction in which precision and interpretation directly affect operational outcomes.

In trade operations, this difference may create risk when one party assumes a document is self-explanatory while another interprets it in light of contextual or relational factors (Hall, 1976). Also, Lewis's cross-cultural communication model helps explain how cultural orientations shape structure, negotiation style, precision, and responsiveness in handling commercial documents and technical terminology (Lewis, 2006). For example, in Angola, ARCCLA processes can be delayed when clear step-by-step instructions are treated as if unwritten additional knowledge fills the gaps. Similarly, a bank guarantee can be written with very strict, universal rules but read as case-by-case, creating confusion about what documents are enough to release the guarantee (Lewis, 2006).

These intercultural dynamics become especially evident in the specific instruments and terms that structure international trade operations. Concepts such as INCOTERMS, ARCCLA (specific to trade imports in Angola), bank guarantees, purchase orders, export certificates, and contracts may appear purely technical, yet their practical use depends on accurate interpretation and a shared understanding between business partners. For example, INCOTERMS allocate transport, risk, and cost responsibilities between buyer and seller in international trade; ARCCLA is the Angolan administrative authority that governs registration/licensing steps relevant to import operations, setting document requirements and deadlines for specific categories of goods. In practice, compliance with ARCCLA originates from Angola's commercial and customs framework (e.g., Código Comercial, Código Aduaneiro/Lei Aduaneira e respetiva regulamentação, despachos e instruções da Administração Geral Tributária), which define a mandatory document requirement that is specific for Angola imports. Consequently, even when parties agree on technical terms, differences in how these instruments are read and applied can still produce delays, rework, or exposure to cost and compliance risk. Also, contracts establish the formal legal framework of the transaction, but their implementation often relies on how clauses are interpreted and communicated in practice.

Taken together, these considerations support the argument that documentation and terminology in international trade are not exclusively technical matters, but also intercultural ones. Their effective management requires not only procedural knowledge, but also intercultural competence, particularly the ability to anticipate how different communication styles and cultural expectations may influence the reading, use, and interpretation of formal commercial instruments.

In the context of the internship at Venture Vanguard, the theoretical perspectives discussed above help demonstrate that international commerce operations are shaped not only by technical and commercial requirements but also by intercultural dynamics that influence communication, interpretation, and coordination.

The authors' discussion provides a useful framework for understanding how cultural differences can affect supplier relationships, trust-building, negotiation practices, and the handling of trade documentation. This is especially relevant in Venture Vanguard's daily activities, where instruments such as INCOTERMS, purchase orders, bank guarantees, certificates, ARCCLA, and contracts require procedural accuracy, clear communication, and shared understanding between international partners. In this sense, the internship section examines whether and how these competences were noticeable in operational practice.

Chapter II – OMATAPALO: Context and Business Environment

Founded in June 2023, in the province of Lubango, OMATAPALO is a business group based in Angola and has a very strong presence in the country's development. Although it's mainly known for construction and public projects, the Group operates across many sectors, such as construction, infrastructure, industry, energy, real estate, mining, agriculture, and other areas that support large national projects (OMATAPALO, 2023; OMATAPALO, n.d.).

The diversity of sectors in which it operates creates a wide range of needs for materials, equipment, machinery, spare parts, and specialized products. Many of these goods are not readily available in the Angolan domestic market, or are not available in the required quantity, quality, or technical standard. Because of this, OMATAPALO has a strong need for international purchases. Imported goods are an essential part of many of its operations and projects, including projects with funding that requires a percentage of imports from specific countries (OMATAPALO, n.d.). As such, international trade is a central part of its business activity.

Venture Vanguard operates in direct response to the needs of OMATAPALO, specifically in procurement, purchasing, logistics, and export processes related to international commerce.

2.1 Venture Vanguard

Venture Vanguard exists because OMATAPALO has a constant and demanding need for international purchases. Due to the scale of the Group, the number of projects that it develops and the diversity of sectors in which it operates, managing purchases from international suppliers requires a dedicated structure. It is not only a matter of buying products abroad, but also involves identifying suppliers, comparing quotations, negotiating prices and payment terms, validating technical specifications, organizing logistics, preparing export documentation, and ensuring the whole process runs as efficiently as possible.

As OMATAPALO continued to grow and to develop large-scale projects, this need also grew. Venture Vanguard was created precisely to answer this operational necessity. It works as an intermediary between international suppliers and OMATAPALO,

assuring the Group's needs for the multitude of projects that it has, while specializing in procurement, purchases, logistics, and export operations.

Venture Vanguard's existence, therefore, reflects a practical and strategic need. Instead of leaving international purchases dispersed or managed without a specialized structure, Venture Vanguard centralizes this process and gives it more focus, organization and control. In this sense, Venture Vanguard is not secondary to OMATAPALO's activity, it plays an essential role in making sure that the Group is able to access the international market and purchase the goods that its projects require at the best price, delivery time and without any problems in the export and import processes.

2.2 Single-client business model

One of Venture Vanguard's most distinctive characteristics is its single-client business model. Although it is an independent company, its activity is directly linked to OMATAPALO. This means that Venture Vanguard does not operate for multiple clients, but instead concentrates all of its work, time, and operational capacity on serving one single client. This is a very specific business structure that shapes how the company functions on a daily basis.

Because Venture Vanguard works only for OMATAPALO, the relationship between the two companies is much closer than in a traditional supplier-client model. Venture Vanguard is not merely providing an occasional service; its activities are fully integrated into the Group's operational needs, particularly in international purchasing, supplier communication, logistics coordination, and export procedures. In practice, this means that Venture Vanguard develops a deep knowledge of OMATAPALO's needs, internal dynamics, priorities, and project requirements. Over time, this creates a high level of specialization, as the company becomes very familiar with the types of products requested, the urgency of operations, and the standards that must be met.

This model also allows for greater coordination and alignment between both companies. Since Venture Vanguard is fully focused on one client, it can adapt its processes more directly to OMATAPALO's demands and operating model, as reflected in client-specific approval flows, templates, and service targets observed during the

internship (Venture Vanguard, 2025, internal first-year results; OMATAPALO, 2025, semester reports — both non-public). Communication tends to be more immediate, expectations are clearer, and the company can organize its work with the client's needs at the centre of its decision-making. This level of alignment can be seen as an advantage, as it allows Venture Vanguard to respond more precisely and with greater dedication to the requests it receives.

At the same time, the single-client model also means that Venture Vanguard's activity is entirely dependent on OMATAPALO. The volume of work, the urgency of requests, and the pressure on the company are all directly linked to the number and scale of projects undertaken by the Group. If OMATAPALO increases its activity, starts new projects, or faces urgent purchasing needs, Venture Vanguard must respond immediately. Its priorities are therefore not defined independently; they are set strictly according to the client's operational reality. The model creates concentration risk and dependence on the client's project pipeline.

For this reason, this business model creates both specialization and dependency. On the one hand, Venture Vanguard benefits from focusing deeply on a single client's needs and developing highly specific knowledge to serve that client. On the other hand, its structure, workload, performance and very existence are inseparable from OMATAPALO's business activities. In this sense, Venture Vanguard establishes itself as a service provider, but also as a company whose single role is directly connected to OMATAPALO's ability to secure goods in the international market. Its single-client business model is therefore one of the defining elements of its identity and the way the company operates.

2.3 Operational pressure and client orientation

The single-client business model of Venture Vanguard is deeply intertwined to another central aspect of its activity: the existence of strong operational pressure combined with a very clear client orientation. Since the company operates exclusively for OMATAPALO, all of its departments and processes are organized around the client's needs, deadlines and priorities. This creates a work environment where responsiveness, efficiency and accuracy are essential and critical.

OMATAPALO is a very large group with many ongoing projects and many different sectors of operation. Because of this, its needs are not only diverse, but often urgent and technically complex. The goods requested may vary significantly depending on the projects and company of the Group, the technical specifications can be highly detailed, and the deadlines are often demanding. In many cases, delays in the purchasing process can critically affect the continuity of works or the execution of operations by the client. This means that Venture Vanguard works under constant pressure to ensure that each request is handled quickly and correctly.

This operational pressure is present throughout the entire process. It begins with the identification of the client's need and continues through supplier search, quotation analyses, negotiation purchasing, logistics and export documentation. At every stage of the process, mistakes or delays can create critical consequences for the client. A product acquired with the wrong specification or inferior quantities, a misunderstanding with a supplier, incomplete documentation or a delay in the shipment can compromise deadlines, generate added costs and disrupt the deadline for inauguration of a project. For this reason, Venture Vanguard's work requires a high level of coordination and attention to detail.

At the same time, the company is deeply client-oriented. Since OMATAPALO is its only client, Venture Vanguard sole role is to serve the Group's interests as effectively as possible. This orientation is visible in the speed the requests are taken care of and in the deep effort to find the best possible solutions in terms of supplier choice, price, payment conditions, quality and delivery time. The company does not simply process orders it actively works to respond to the client's needs in a way that supports the continuity and efficiency of the Group's projects, as if they are their own.

This client orientation is reinforced by OMATAPALO's dependency on imported goods. As already mentioned, many of the materials, machines, spare parts and technical specific products required by the Group are sourced in the international market. This means that Venture Vanguard is not dealing with occasional or secondary purchases, in fact it's dealing with the majority of the purchases done by the Group for goods that are essential to the operations. International purchasing is therefore a constant necessity, which gives additional importance to Venture Vanguard's role. The

company must ensure that the procurement and purchasing process is complete in a way that answers the client's operational expectations and requirements.

In this sense, operational pressure and client orientation are not separate realities, they are two connected aspects of the same business model: the single-client business model. The fact that Venture Vanguard works for one large client with continuous and varied import needs creates a structure in which the company must remain permanently aligned with the client's operational demands. Its daily work is shaped by urgency, responsibility and the need to provide reliable solutions in an international environment that is characterized by being complex and unpredictable. For this reason, these two elements are essential to understand the role that Venture Vanguard holds. The company does not operate in a neutral environment. It operates under constant pressure of supporting a large business group whose projects depend on international supply, and it does so through a strong and focused orientation towards the needs and priorities of that client. This helps explain why Venture Vanguard's activity requires technical and logistical competences, but also a very strict coordination, adaptability and operational focus.

Chapter III – Venture Vanguard: Organizational Structure and Operations

Venture Vanguard was established on 19th April 2024 in Funchal, Zona Franca da Madeira, with the majority of its operations based in Leça do Balio, Oporto. The company started operating in October of 2024. Its creation was driven by a practical and strategic necessity linked to OMAPATALO's growing demand for international purchasing.

The financial market in Angola is characterized by high volatility and structural constraints that raise financing risk, including elevated interest rates, shallow capital markets, and FX pressures (International Monetary Fund, 2025; World Bank, 2025). The country has limited capital market depth, remains highly dependent on the petrol sector, is marked by exchange-rate instability, shows weak transparency in corporate financial reporting, and faces constraints on institutional and legal enforcement. These factors are consistent with a less predictable financing environment and can make it harder for large firms to secure credit on favourable terms, which may, in turn, complicate efforts to build strong, fully trusted supplier relationships when payment risk and funding costs are salient (International Monetary Fund, 2025; World Bank, 2025).

In this context, OMATAPALO needed a company established in a more stable economic environment that could easily access financing and support its expansion into the global market. This need, combined with the scale of its projects and the costefficiency of having a specialized trading company focused on purchasing, exporting to Angola, and customs-related bureaucracy, led to the establishment of Venture Vanguard.

Venture Vanguard operates as an intermediary between international suppliers and OMATAPALO. Its role is to search the international market for the goods requested by the client, identify the fastest, cheapest, and technically approved solution, present the options in a comparative spreadsheet, purchase the approved option under the best payment conditions, organize the logistics operation, and ensure that all the export documentation and legal compliance necessary for the cargo to arrive in Angola safely as fast as possible.

As explained in the past chapter, Venture Vanguard operates in a single-client business model. Although an independent company, its activity is directly linked to OMATAPALO, which leads to specialization, full attention, and a directed workflow tailored to the client, as well as to a strong dependence between the companies.

In little more than a year, the company managed purchases amounting to 100 million euros of cargo, as evidenced by Venture Vanguard's internal financial reports for its first year of operations (non-public), and played a crucial role in important projects, OMATAPALO projects, such as the Hospital Pedalé; the Centre of Events, where the celebrations of the 50 years of independence occurred on the 11th of November of 2025 and where many worldwide leaders were received at; Fazenda Mumba, the first resort in Angola that connects the nature as it is with tourism while having the commodities of a resort, it was even used as the scenery for a Portuguese television show; the Cabinda Ocean Terminal, that focuses on the export of petrol and has exponential financial value to the country (MINSa, 2025). With all the different projects completed and those still to be done, the company has also evolved tremendously through the proper establishment and division of departments, the hiring of new people, and the expansion of its presence.

3.1 Organizational structure

Venture Vanguard's organizational structure comprises two administrators: a Chief of Operations and a General Manager. These positions represent the highest levels of authority within the company and are responsible for defining the company's strategy, overseeing overall operations, and ensuring that the company's objectives align with its clients' needs.

Below the upper management, the company is organized into five operational departments: Procurement, Purchases, Logistics, Export, and Finance. Each department is led by a Department Chief and is responsible for a specific part of the overall process for fulfilling OMATAPALO's needs. Although the responsibilities are clearly divided, the departments work in close coordination because the company's activities depend on the continuity of the workflow from one phase to the next.

The structure of Venture Vanguard was designed with clear procedures in mind, allowing each department to be responsible for the designated parts of the process while maintaining effective communication with the others. The distribution of functions promotes coordination and helps the company manage procurement, purchasing, logistics, exports, and financial control cohesively.

3.2 Operational workflow

Venture Vanguard's operations follow a structured workflow that begins with OMATAPALO's request and ends only when the cargo is delivered to Angola and all financial and export-related requirements are completed. The workflow depends on close coordination between the departments and on continuous communication with the supplier, logistics partners, financial institutions, and the client, OMATAPALO. A simplified view of the workflow is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Venture Vanguard's simplified workflow

Stage	Main Department	Role in the process	Main documents	Main communication partner	Possible challenges and risks
1. Request and technical definition	Procurement	Receives the request, analyses the specifications and starts the search within multiple suppliers in the international market	Request information, technical specifications and technical data sheets	OMATAPALO and suppliers	Unclear specifications, urgency of the request and difficulty in identifying possible suppliers

2. Quotation, comparison and approval	Procurement	Assembles the different quotations and prepares the comparative analyses for approval	Quotations, comparative spreadsheet, technical documentation	Suppliers and OMATAPALO	Limited number of suppliers, difficulty comparing offers and delayed responses from the suppliers lead to less option that could be better suited
3. Final negotiation and purchase formalization	Purchases	Negotiates conditions, issues the purchase order and formalizes the transaction	NEI, supplier quotation, contracts, purchase order (NE1/NE2)	Suppliers, OMATAPALO and Procurement	Contractual ambiguity, incorrect order details and complications in the negotiation due to the cultural differences
4. Transport coordination	Logistics	Coordinates the collection and/or delivery, shipment and transport to Angola	Invoices, insurance, transport information	Suppliers, logistics partner, Purchases and OMATAPALO	Supplier delays, lack of cargo space, transport disruptions and inefficient or inappropriate loading
5. Export compliance	Export	Ensures all documents are correct, complete and compliant	Certificates of origin, certificates of conformity, technical data sheets, trial tests, BL/AWB and insurance documents	Suppliers, logistics partners and Logistics	Missing or inconsistent documents, regulatory noncompliance and customs delays

6. Payment and financial control	Finance	Manages payments, bank guarantees and export certificate follow-up	Payment records, bank guarantees, Certificates of Export	Suppliers, banks, OMATAPALO, Logistics and Purchases	Payment delays, transfer delays from Angola, bank guarantees misunderstandings and VAT related issues
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An analysis of the workflow depicted in Table 1 shows how Venture Vanguard's operations depend not only on technical and administrative precision but also on constant coordination between the different departments and external actors. At every stage, any delay, misunderstanding, or inconsistency in documentation can compromise the continuity of the client's projects. For this reason, efficiency in Venture Vanguard depends on the quality of communication, clarity of procedures, and the ability to manage and adapt to complexity in an international environment.

To better understand the workflow, the section that follows describes each department in terms of responsibility, the main documents that are handled, the department's main communication partners and the main risks and challenges that arise. Finally, due to the relevance of the internship, a brief reflection regarding intercultural competence in each department is also added.

3.3 Departmental roles in the workflow

3.3.1 Procurement Department

The Procurement Department is responsible for initiating the sourcing process whenever OMATAPALO submits a request for a specific material type and quantity. Once the request is received, the department begins identifying and contacting potential suppliers in both national and international markets. The technical specifications of the required materials are then analysed and discussed with the suppliers to ensure that the products offered meet the client's requirements. After this clarification stage, suppliers are asked to submit their quotations, and the department aims to collect proposals from

at least three suppliers. This ensures a competitive procurement process and allows the department to compare prices, delivery times, payment terms, and compliance with technical requirements. The department prepares a comparative spreadsheet summarizing key information: quoted prices, delivery times, commercial terms, and technical data sheets. This document is sent to the person responsible for the request to make a decision. After selecting the preferred supplier, the Procurement department conducts an additional negotiation and forwards the process to the Purchasing department, along with all necessary information to proceed with the purchase.

The main documents handled by this department are supplier quotations, comparative spreadsheets, technical data sheets, final quotations, and the information email sent to the Purchases Department, including payment terms, delivery time, negotiated INCOTERMS, and technical documentation relevant to the cargo's export.

The Procurement department communicates mainly with OMATAPALO and international and national suppliers, and, in the next stage of the process, with the Purchases department.

Despite the structured nature of the process, the Procurement Department faces several operational challenges. One of the most significant challenges is the pressure of urgent delivery deadlines, which require rapid sourcing and equally rapid supplier responses. In some cases, especially for special, highly technical requests, it can be difficult to find multiple suppliers capable of fulfilling them. This makes it impossible to compare processes effectively and harder to ensure that what is being offered is the best, most competitive, and fairest price.

Another challenge lies in the continuous search for new suppliers while simultaneously establishing reliable partnerships that support operational needs and cultivating long-term financial and commercial relationships that benefit both companies. This challenge reveals that, even though the Procurement process is structured to ensure competitiveness and an informed decision, in practice, the availability of technically correct suppliers is sometimes limited. As a result, the Procurement department sometimes prioritizes urgency over a broader market comparison. This creates an imbalance between efficiency and strategic sourcing, something that is very common in project-focused international trading.

Intercultural competence is especially relevant in Procurement since the department interacts daily with suppliers from different countries and business environments. The ability to adapt communication styles, clarify the technical details, and build trust across cultural contexts contributes to more effective negotiations and reduces the risk of misunderstanding at the very beginning of the process.

3.3.2. Purchases Department

The Purchases Department is responsible for managing the final administrative and contractual aspects of the procurement process. After receiving the NEI with the corresponding supplier quotation and Procurement ID, the department formalizes the transaction by proceeding with the final negotiation, preparing contracts for orders above 50 thousand euros and issuing the official purchase order in PRIMAVERA. The INCOTERMS (ICC, 2019) are discussed in more depth at this stage, with the Purchases department coordinating with the supplier to find the best solution for both parties. Also, any additional discount that can be applied is negotiated at this stage.

The purchase order includes all relevant details related to the transaction. Such as the correct description of the articles, the quantities requested, the agreed payment conditions, the country of origin of the goods, the port or airport of destination, the expected delivery time, and the applicable INCOTERMS (ICC, 2019) and unit and total prices. These descriptions must be in line with the information provided in the supplier's quotation.

It's also the Purchases department's responsibility to maintain the Export Map. This document is an Excel spreadsheet used as a monitoring and control tool, consolidating all relevant information for each order the company manages. The Export Map allows both companies, Venture Vanguard and OMATAPALO, to track the status of the purchases and shipments. The spreadsheet includes detailed data for every order, such as: the type of freight (sea or air), the corresponding NEI number, the project associated with the order, total value of the purchase, it identifies the company withing OMATAPALO that requested the materials, the supplier name, the agreed payment conditions, payment dates and amounts to be paid, the expected delivery time, supplier's invoice number, the invoice number issued by Venture Vanguard to

OMATAPALO, the insurance number, container identification, vessel name, estimated time of arrival (ETA), the transport documentation, such as the Bill of Landing for sea freight and the Airway Bill for air freight shipments and the status of each order. By maintaining this map updated, the Purchases department ensures effective monitoring of all orders and facilitates the coordination between the different departments. This map is sent to the client, OMATAPALO, every Friday, including all the week's updated data.

The main documents handled by the Purchases department are the NEI, supplier quotation, Procurement ID, contracts, purchase orders, NE1/NE2, and the Export Map.

This department primarily communicates with suppliers, OMATAPALO, Procurement, Logistics, Export and Finance to consolidate the order.

The Purchases department faces several operational and administrative challenges. The first is negotiating favourable payment terms while maintaining good commercial relationships. It's crucial for the purchasing department to prioritize the company's financial position and ensure that trade accounts can be opened with suppliers. Another critical challenge is ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the purchase orders used to avoid complications during customs clearance. If there are complications, they can result in delays, additional inspections or unexpected costs associated with exporting the material. Coordination between the different departments also represents a challenge. The Purchases department must communicate effectively with the Procurement department, the on-site teams at OMATAPALO, suppliers and the Logistics and Export department to ensure that all information is consistent. At the same time, the department often works under considerable pressure due to demanding project deadlines and must therefore balance speed with precision.

In this department, intercultural competence plays the utmost critical role because negotiation practices, contractual expectations and interpretations of commercial terms often differ across suppliers and countries. The ability to communicate clearly, adapt to different business approaches, and avoid misunderstandings is essential to ensure that the purchase is formalized correctly and that the process continues without disruption.

3.3.3. Logistics Department

Once the purchase is completed, the responsibility for the order is transferred to the Logistics department. This department ensures that the supplier complies with the previously agreed-upon delivery schedule and that the goods are prepared for transportation in accordance with the logistics requirements.

The department monitors the supplier's preparation and dispatch of goods and organizes collection when the agreed INCOTERMS require it. When the Incoterm negotiated is FOB, the supplier is responsible for loading the goods onto the agreed vessel for shipment.

Venture Vanguard works with two specialized transit companies, since the company doesn't have its own warehouse: ARNAUD Logistics, responsible for all the sea freight, and ABREU Logistics, dedicated to the air freight. This requires close coordination with both partners to arrange the shipment of the orders the company is responsible for and to secure space on the vessel. In urgent situations, the department may also arrange private cargo aircraft in order to reduce delivery times for priority projects.

The Logistics department supervises the loading and handling of orders, ensuring that goods are properly packed, secured, and stowed within containers or aircraft cargo areas. It's also essential to ensure the container space is used efficiently to avoid additional costs from unnecessary containers. Additionally, the department is also responsible for issuing invoices to OMATAPALO and arranging cargo insurance.

The main documents handled by this department include invoices, insurance documentation, shipment information and transport documents such as BL's and AWB's.

The Logistics department communicates mainly with suppliers, transit companies, OMATAPALO and the Purchases, Exports and Finance Departments.

The main challenges of this department concern coordinating international transport and meeting delivery deadlines. The first challenge is ensuring suppliers deliver goods within the agreed timeframe, as delays can disrupt the shipment schedule and compromise timely material supply to the client. Another challenge, particularly in

air freight shipments, is securing available space for the cargo during periods of high demand or international instability. The department must also ensure efficient loading and packing in order to avoid unnecessary transport costs and minimize the risk of damage in transit. These challenges showcase the vulnerability of international supply chains to external disruptions and reinforce the importance of logistical planning and responsiveness.

Intercultural competence is relevant in Logistics because the department works daily with partners in different countries, each with different communication habits, expectations, and work rhythms. The ability to adapt communication, cross-time-zone coordination, and the maintenance of effective working relationships are essential to ensuring continuity in the transport chain.

3.3.4. Export Department

The Export department is responsible for ensuring that all necessary technical and commercial documentation required for international trade is properly prepared and compliant with international trade requirements. Its role is to support both export and import processes by ensuring that all documentation is accurate, complete, and issued within the required timeframe. In addition, the export department serves an advisory function, as it must possess strong knowledge of customs laws and procedures to guide other departments on how to proceed with each order.

The main documents handled by the Export department are technical data sheets, certificates of origin, certificates of conformity, trial tests (requested specifically for electric cables), ARCCLA, BL's and AWB's, invoices and insurance documentation.

This department primarily communicates with suppliers, logistics partners, the other internal departments involved in the process and the Imports department of OMATAPALO.

This export department faces several challenges related to managing international trade documentation and complying with customs regulations, the most important one is ensuring that all required documents are accurate and fully consistent with the purchase and shipping information. Any error, omission, or inconsistency in

the documentation may result in delays in customs clearance or complications during the export and import process. Another challenge is keeping up to date with the different customs laws and legal requirements, which vary according to the goods' country of origin and destination, such as Angola. The Export department must also coordinate closely with suppliers, logistics partners, and other departments to ensure that all documentation is issued on time, despite the pressure imposed by demanding delivery schedules and the complexity of international shipments.

Intercultural competence is important in the Export department because suppliers do not always share the same understanding of documentary requirements, procedures, or deadlines. Clear and culturally sensitive communication helps explain requirements more effectively, reduces the possibility of misunderstanding, and supports compliance across different international contexts.

3.3.5. Finance Department

The Finance Department becomes involved as soon as the purchase is made and is responsible for managing the financial dimension of the operation. Depending on the agreement established with the suppliers, different payment conditions may apply. In some cases, payments are made in instalments, with an initial percentage due upon order confirmation and the remaining amount under specific conditions. In other situations, orders are managed through a trade account that requires careful monitoring to avoid payment delays. For orders exceeding 50000 in value, regardless of the currency, the process also requires the supplier to issue a bank guarantee in accordance with the requirements established by Venture Vanguard's bank. Another important responsibility of the Finance department is sending the Certificates of Export to each supplier. Every purchase is exempt from VAT according to Portuguese law., Article 14th of CIVA: every cargo above the amount of 1000 euros is exempt from VAT if the cargo is strictly for export, and it must not enter the national market. The suppliers must receive the export certificate issued by Portuguese customs within the legal 90-day period from the supplier's invoice date (see Artigo 14.º - Direito Fiscal , Código do IVA, Capítulo II, Isenções, Secção III, Isenções na exportação, operações assimiladas a exportações e transportes internacionais, published in 2022 in O Informador Fiscal, 2022).

The main documents handled by the Finance department are supplier invoices, payment records, trade account records, bank guarantees and Certificates of Export.

The department communicates mainly with suppliers, banks, OMATAPALO and the internal departments involved in payment follow-up and export compliance: the Purchases and Logistical departments.

The Finance department faces several challenges in managing international payments and financial control of the purchasing process. One of the main difficulties lies in managing the different payment terms across the company's suppliers. These arrangements require careful monitoring to ensure payments are made within the agreed deadlines and financial obligations are fulfilled without delay. Another important challenge is that Venture Vanguard's only client is OMATAPALO, based in Angola. As a result, the funds required to pay suppliers' invoices often depend on international transfers from Angola. Due to banking procedures, currency regulations, and administrative processes, these transfers very often take longer than expected. These delays can affect supplier payments and create pressure on the company's cash flow and financial reserves. In addition, the department must ensure compliance with Portuguese VAT exemption rules for exports. This includes ensuring that suppliers receive the Certificate of Export within the legal deadline, which sometimes doesn't happen because of customs complications or errors in issuing the document. Failure to provide this document within the required timeframe may result in the supplier having to charge VAT, creating additional administrative and financial complications.

Intercultural competence is especially relevant in Finance because financial terms, guarantees, and payment expectations are often understood differently depending on the supplier's commercial and cultural context. Clear communication, sensitivity to different business practices, and the ability to explain financial requirements precisely help prevent misunderstandings and contribute to smoother international transactions.

3.4. Corporate Culture

According to Schein (2010), organizational culture can be understood through three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts are visual

organizational elements, such as practices, structures, and processes. Espoused values are the principles and strategies that are preached by the company. Lastly, underlying assumptions represent the deep core beliefs that guide the behaviour. This framework is extremely useful for analysing Venture Vanguard's organizational culture, since its culture, processes, and interdepartmental cooperation are clear artifacts of a corporate culture strongly oriented towards reliability and operational efficiency.

Venture Vanguard's corporate culture is oriented towards reliability, efficiency, close cooperation with OMATAPALO, and "making it happen," however and whatever it takes. Since Venture Vanguard operates exclusively to support OMATAPALO, the organizational culture emphasizes commitment to client projects, adherence to project deadlines, and a strong focus on client needs. Also, its corporate culture is characterized by operating in constantly evolving, volatile markets, which require team performance, adaptability, and strategic planning.

Teamwork and coordination between all departments are the most important elements of the company's culture. This is emphasized and cultivated through the annual teambuilding day the company organizes, where every department comes together to work on teamwork and group development, including employees in Madeira. The process necessary to fulfil the client's needs requires a close relationship among the five departments. This collaborative environment allows Venture Vanguard to manage the complex international operations more efficiently.

Venture Vanguard offers its employees 40 hours of mandatory training. This training covers subjects such as continuous development, logistics, Incoterms, and all topics related to international trade.

Another important aspect of the corporate culture is the responsibility and attention to detail that each process requires. International trade is highly complex, especially given the logistics and customs procedures involved. Employees must be coordinated to ensure that documentation, payments, and shipments are handled correctly to avoid delays. This also demands and promotes a culture of adaptability and a problem-solving mentality. Due to tight deadlines, international transport challenges, the force majeure we are currently living through, and financial processes, the company, as a whole, must respond quickly to unexpected situations and find effective solutions to ensure client projects continue without interruption.

Departments are evaluated based on measurable performance indicators, including discounts, trade execution, the number of processes per week, and the time it takes for cargo to arrive in Luanda.

Another element is the importance of building strong relationships with the suppliers, logistics partners, and financial institutions. Venture Vanguard frequently works with the same partners; this cultivates trust and long-term collaboration, which is essential to ensuring the client's projects succeed and to helping every company involved grow. Employers are encouraged to develop and maintain partnerships with the suppliers. The goal is for the supplier and its partners to grow with Venture Vanguard and OMATAPALO. As an example, ARNAUD Logistics has made many changes in response to the growth in exports that Venture Vanguard brought to the business: for instance, changes to warehouse space planning and the hiring of a dedicated employee to compile the Export Certificates. Both companies grew and adapted, establishing a strong partnership. Over time, Venture Vanguard is becoming more financially secure, which is a key factor in its role within OMATAPALO. This ensures that the door to financing, better payment terms, and a stronger reputation in the financial sector is becoming increasingly open, reinforcing the company's position to establish international trade.

Given the company's position in global markets, Venture Vanguard fosters a multicultural, internationally oriented corporate environment. Collaboration across regions, continents, and time zones happens every day. This requires cultural awareness and adaptability.

In conclusion, Venture Vanguard's corporate culture is shaped by its role as a specialized trading company that operates in close interdependence with OMATAPALO. According to Schein (2010), organizational culture is shaped by shared assumptions, values, and practices developed as a response to external adaptation and internal integration. In the case of Venture Vanguard, this is clearly reflected in its strong client-oriented mindset, operational processes, and commitment to delivering results under tight pressure.

Venture Vanguard's organisational culture is more appropriately analysed through the shared practices observed during the internship than through national cultural dimensions. In Schein's terms, the company's culture is visible in its informal

coordination, cross-departmental teamwork, strong client orientation, procedural controls, and rapid adaptation under operational pressure. Holliday's contextual approach also supports treating these practices as a local organisational or "small culture" produced within this particular workplace, rather than as the direct expression of a national culture (Holliday, 2019; Holliday et al., 2021).

Chapter IV – Intercultural Dynamics in International Commerce and Trading Companies

Given the globalized world in which international trade operates today, it is a field which increasingly requires interactions among individuals, organizations, and institutions from different cultural backgrounds. As a result, intercultural communication is essential for the success of all international business operations.

Thus, intercultural competence is more than a desirable skill; it is an operational capability that enables companies to coordinate more efficiently, reduce misunderstandings, and sustain business relationships across borders. In the case of Venture Vanguard, this is especially relevant because the company serves as an intermediary between international suppliers and OMATAPALO, so many of its daily tasks depend on clear communication, accurate interpretation, and the ability to adapt to diverse professional environments.

The sections that follow examine how intercultural dynamics affect Venture Vanguard's operations in practice and how the internship experience provided evidence that intercultural competence directly contributes to operational continuity, risk reduction, and more efficient decision-making.

4.1 Intercultural competence and operational risk reduction

Intercultural competence has a crucial role in international trade because business increasingly involves interactions between actors shaped by different cultural, institutional, and professional contexts. In this sense, effective communication is not just a matter of mastering languages and being fluent; it also requires the ability to recognize differing expectations, interpret behaviour accurately, and adjust communication to support mutual understanding.

According to Bennett (2004), intercultural competence involves the ability to recognize cultural differences and gradually develop more effective ways of interaction with them. In a business context, this perspective is particularly relevant because intercultural competence is distanced from a strictly theoretical construct and situated

within practical action. In companies operating across borders, intercultural competence becomes noticeable in supplier communication, negotiation, conflict prevention and problem-solving. Similarly, Geert Hofstede (2001) suggests that differences in hierarchy, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and collective versus individual decision-making inherently shape how organizations communicate, establish trust, and respond to risk.

Nevertheless, Hofstede's dimensions are not used here as predictive categories or as evidence that all suppliers from a particular country share the same values or behaviours. The framework is retained only as a sensitising heuristic for identifying issues that may require further examination, such as hierarchy, approaches to uncertainty, decision-making, and expectations concerning time. Holliday (2019), Holliday et al. (2021), and Dervin and Gross (2016) provide an important corrective by approaching intercultural communication as situated, dynamic, and co-constructed through interaction. The analysis therefore prioritises the documented incident, the supplier's organisational constraints, the participants' professional roles, and the specific commercial relationship over national labels.

Venture Vanguard, intercultural competence is recognized as a crucial means of reducing operational risk. The company's daily operations depend on interpreting quotations, clarifying technical details, negotiating conditions, explaining regulatory requirements, and ensuring that all parties understand their respective responsibilities. Misunderstandings at any of these stages may lead to delays, financial pressure, documentary inconsistencies, or contractual tension—for example, an ARCCLA submission returned because the HS code was provided with 6 digits instead of the required 8, pushing the import past the licensing window; another example, a bank guarantee was initially approved by the supplier and, later on, when in direct contact with the Finance Department, upon understanding what guarantee was actually required, it wasn't accepted. For this reason, intercultural competence helps prevent operational disruption before it happens.

Many of the tasks described in Chapter IV translate theory into practice, presenting situations in which the central problem was not the absence of a document or a predefined procedure, but the differing ways suppliers interpreted the requirements, responsibilities, or commercial expectations. In this sense, intercultural

competence did not function as an abstract theoretical concept; it was a practical mechanism for anticipating misunderstandings, reformulating the explanations, and protecting the continuity of the operation.

A critical case that illustrates this dynamic is the clarification of financial and documentary requirements before the order progresses to the finance stage. In several situations, if expectations had not been made explicit early enough, the process would have proceeded under different assumptions on each side. This would later create delays in production, payment, shipment, and, worst of all, in the client's conclusion of the project. The need to clarify, reformulate, and confirm that the supplier understands and is on the same page regarding the order became part of risk management itself.

Intercultural competence is not external to Venture Vanguard's operations, it is embedded in the daily operations, as observed during the internship across supplier communication, documentation alignment and contract negotiation. In practice, tasks were completed more predictably when intercultural cues were anticipated and addressed, which supports treating intercultural competence as a necessary operational capability rather than a separate, optional skill (based on direct observation of the procurement-to-export workflow and internal procedures). It supports the quality of communication, reduces ambiguity and contributes to more effective decision-making in the high-pressure environment in which the company operates.

4.2 Supplier communication and expectations

Venture Vanguard operates in an intercultural environment, working daily with suppliers, logistics partners and financial institutions from all over the world. As a result, supplier communication is shaped by the technical requirements of the request and by differing expectations regarding response time, level of formality, detail, flexibility and relationship-building.

Maude (2016) provides a useful bridge between intercultural theory and international business practice by examining cross-cultural communication across varied organisational and commercial contexts. From this perspective, general cultural frameworks may alert practitioners to possible differences, but they cannot replace

close analysis of the particular relationship and transaction. Effective supplier communication therefore requires attention to the parties' organisational procedures, previous experience, contractual position, communication history, and immediate operational constraints. This contextual approach is adopted in the analysis that follows.

During the internship, it became very clear that different suppliers exhibited distinct communication and expectation patterns, often associated with their business environment, institutional culture, prior experience in export operations and their degree of familiarity with trade in Angola. One of the most common patterns observed during the internship was the variation in how suppliers handled speed and flexibility. Some suppliers showed a more solution-oriented approach and adapted quickly to urgent requests, while others adopted a more formal and procedural mode of communication, requiring stricter processes for approval, documentation and contractual review. One specific example of this is the supplier Nan Steel, a Chinese steel manufacturer. To them, the process is very strict: a quotation is issued with a validity period, the purchase order from Venture Vanguard is issued and sent, a Letter of Credit has to be issued as a form of payment within 15 days of the adjudication, and only when it's approved by both parties and their respective financial institutions, the production commences. For a specific order, the Letter of Credit took longer to be issued, which led to increases in shipping costs and in the cost of galvanized steel. This wasn't communicated properly, and the misunderstanding resulted in a 60-day delay and a rise of almost 100,000 euros. Despite all the appeals, the supplier remained inflexible and would not commence production until the Letter of Credit was issued. This goes to show how supplier communication and expectation can affect the rhythm of negotiation and the speed with which Venture Vanguard could move a process forward.

Another important incident concerns suppliers refusing to formalize a supply contract according to Venture Vanguard's draft and instead insisting on using their own documentations and standard terms. This situation illustrates the limits of assuming a universal model of contractual behaviour in international trade. As discussed in the theoretical framework, intercultural competence is not only about communication style but also about understanding how different business cultures approach formalization, trust and commitment. In Venture Vanguard's case, this was visible in negotiations

where some suppliers treated the contract as a flexible starting point for discussion, while others viewed it as a non-negotiable legal instrument that had to follow their internal procedures. This confirms that each interaction requires attention to the supplier's expectations, internal approval processes and preferred way of formalizing commitment, reinforcing the need for clearer negotiation and documentation strategies.

Communication with the supplier also involved adapting the level of explicitness. In some cases, a short operational communication was enough to move the process forward. In other cases, the same issue required a fuller explanation, the repetition of technical points, or written confirmation of responsibility.

The internship showed that supplier communication is not only about transmitting communication, but it's also about adjusting expectations. Intercultural competence appeared in the ability to understand when more detail was needed, when more directness was required, and when the preservation of the commercial relationship demanded a more careful tone. In operational terms, this reduced the probability of misunderstandings and improved overall coordination.

4.3 Contractual expectations and negotiation

One of the clearest areas where intercultural dynamics became evident was the negotiation and formalization of contracts. In international trade, contracts are designed to reduce uncertainty by defining obligations, timelines, responsibilities and solutions, as well as protecting both parties. However, the internship experience showed that the existence of a contract does not eliminate intercultural complexity. On the contrary, it often makes that complexity even more visible and noticeable because contractual clauses still need to be interpreted, accepted, and operationalized by both parties with different expectations.

Some suppliers did not accept Venture Vanguard's standard contractual framework and instead required the use of their own draft of terms and conditions.

This was not simply a legal issue, it also had an intercultural dimension, reflecting different assumptions about where authority over the transaction should lie, how risks should be allocated, and how much flexibility was acceptable in negotiation.

The Aluprof example illustrates this in practice: the supplier required formalizing its own contract draft before moving forward, while Venture Vanguard needed to safeguard specific operational requirements. Neither side was “right” or “wrong”, each approached contractual security through its own framework. Venture Vanguard negotiated carefully to protect both the operation and the relationship, which helped establish a stable working partnership with the supplier that has continued beyond the initial transaction. This type of case can be analysed through Trompenaars’s distinction between universalism and particularism. Some business environments place a stronger emphasis on standardized rules and formal contractual consistency, while others allow greater room for situational adjustment and negotiated flexibility. The point is not to assign a fixed culture to each supplier; rather, to recognize that these orientations can and influence how negotiations unfold.

An important analytical point is that contracts in Venture Vanguard’s operations aren’t merely legal documents; they are tools for aligning interpretation. When there was uncertainty about obligations, timelines, and responsibilities, the contract served to reduce ambiguity. However, if the same clause is read and interpreted differently by both parties, the contract itself could also become a source of friction. This means that intercultural competence was necessary before the contract, during the negotiation, and in the explanation and implementation of the terms defined contractually.

The internship demonstrated that contractual negotiation is not merely administrative. It is a process of intercultural mediation in which legal precision, commercial strategy, and relational sensitivity must be balanced simultaneously.

4.4 ARCCLA as regulatory-cultural mediation

ARCCLA is a document required for imports to Angola and involves both cost and procedural responsibility. The difficulty arises because many suppliers are not familiar with this requirement, especially when they don’t regularly export to Angola. In such cases, the problem is not necessarily the refusal to be responsible for the issuance, it’s rather the unfamiliarity and hesitation regarding the additional cost and procedural burden.

The ARCCLA requirement provides one of the strongest examples of how regulation and intercultural communication intersect. ARCCLA is not only a technical or documentary matter. In the context of Venture Vanguard's operations, it serves as a mediator between Angolan import requirements and international suppliers' expectations.

ARCCLA is a document required for imports into Angola and entails both cost and procedural responsibilities, as defined by Angola's licensing and customs framework (Ministério da Indústria e Comércio, 2023; AGT, n.d.). The difficulty arises because many international suppliers are not used to export to Angola and, therefore, don't have familiarity with this specific requirement from Angola. In such cases, the problem is not necessarily the refusal to take responsibility for the issuance; rather, it's the unfamiliarity and hesitation regarding the additional cost and procedural burden.

Suppliers with different prior experience in Angola exports responded differently to ARCCLA requirements. This makes ARCCLA an example of regulatory cultural mediation, that is, translating explicit rules into shared, workable steps across cultures so the licensing process is understood and executed the same way by everyone involved (Hall, 1976; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012; Lewis, 2006). Venture Vanguard is not simply requesting a document; it is translating a local regulatory requirement into terms that an international supplier can understand, accept, and operationalize. This involves explaining why the document exists, who is expected to handle it under the agreed-upon Incoterm, what the cost implications are, and how the process affects the shipment's timing. A critical issue arises regarding who should issue and pay for ARCCLA under CIF or CIP terms. In these situations, the challenge was not regulatory interpretation; it was indeed the need to align different assumptions about the commercial responsibility. This created pressure in negotiations and required careful clarification from Venture Vanguard.

This is one of the contexts where intercultural competence becomes operational. Employees must communicate a local and very specific requirement to partners who may not share the same regulatory background, documentary experience, or assumptions about export obligations. If this is not done clearly, the result may be a delay, refusal, an unexpected cost allocation, or a deterioration of the relationship. If it's done well, the process becomes smoother for the order in process and for future

cooperation. This also presents an opportunity for suppliers to learn more with Venture Vanguard for future partnerships.

4.5 Bank guarantees and terminology

Another major analytical issue identified during the internship concerns the interpretation of financial terminology, especially the term "bank guarantee". At first sight, this may appear to be a technical matter. However, it's also an intercultural and communicative issue because the same term may lead to different documents and different procedural expectations depending on the supplier's background and experience. For different suppliers, a bank guarantee might take different forms. This creates a risk at the very beginning of the transaction. If Venture Vanguard assumes that the supplier interprets the term in the same way, and the supplier assumes something totally different, the discrepancy may only become noticeable later, when the finance stage has already started. At that point, time has already been lost, and the process becomes harder to correct.

This is why it is important to specify that the financial requirement is a Standby Letter of Credit (SBLC), rather than using a more generic term. In international trade, the use of precise financial terminology is essential because different instruments carry different legal and operational implications, particularly in relation to the timing of production, payment conditions and risk allocation between parties. Clarifying the exact instrument at the negotiation stage helps ensure that the supplier, the bank and Venture Vanguard are aligned on the documentary requirements before the order progresses. In this sense, precise terminology functions as a preventive operational measure, reducing the risk of later mismatch between the company's expectations and the supplier's interpretation.

According to the International Chamber of Commerce, standby documentary credits require precise drafting because their use depends on strict alignment between the parties' documentary expectations and the issuing bank's conditions (ICC, 2022). In addition, banking literature on trade finance emphasizes that distinguishing a Standby Letter of Credit from other forms of guarantee is essential to prevent operational misunderstandings and documentary discrepancies (ICC, 2019).

From an analytical perspective, this issue can be linked to Hall's work on communication context and to the broader literature on business communication. A term may appear explicit and universal, but in practice, its meaning depends on shared assumptions. When those assumptions are not shared, precision becomes essential (Hall, 1976). In international trade, technical vocabulary often appears universal, but its operational interpretation varies with community norms, collocations and document genres such as POs, guarantees, and certificates (Cabr , 1999).

A critical incident occurs on orders that require an advance payment above 50 thousand euros, and, therefore, there's a need for the issuance of a bank guarantee: production only begins after the advance payment, and the advance payment itself is only made when the required guarantee has been issued. If the guarantee is misunderstood at the negotiation stage, the entire chain is delayed. What appears to be a linguistic problem quickly becomes a financial and operational problem.

This demonstrates that terminology is not secondary. In Venture Vanguard's environment, terminology clarification is part of coordination, timing, and financial control. The internship showed that intercultural competence includes the ability to identify words that may appear to be clear but are not operationally safe unless they are further specified and understood at their core by both parties.

4.6 Time pressure, urgency and decision-making

Time pressure is one of the defining conditions of Venture Vanguard's operations, and it strongly shapes the intercultural dimension of the decision-making process. As already shown in the previous chapter, OMATAPALO's projects often require urgent purchasing and rapid response. This means that Venture Vanguard rarely operates in a neutral time frame. Instead, communication, negotiation and problem-solving take place under pressure.

Different suppliers and business environments do not always respond to urgency in the same way. Some processes move quickly, while others require consultation, internal approval, or a more formal decision-making sequence. For instance, in the contract case, the supplier required its own contract draft to be formally

approved before proceeding, which introduced extra negotiation rounds and internal sign-offs; by contrast, other partners have advanced faster when the contract followed a standard template with clearly defined clauses and no case-by-case adjustments.

This can reflect differences in organizational and professional approaches to time, hierarchy, and risk, but also practical factors such as workload, internal bureaucracy, legal review cycles, stock availability and supplier size. These differences become highly relevant when a company such as Venture Vanguard must move quickly but depends on partners whose decision-making rhythm may be slower or with more layers. This affects response time and the style of decision-making. In some cases, rapid operational closure is possible through direct communication with a decision-maker. In others, even seemingly simple adjustments require multiple internal validations. Under normal circumstances, this might be manageable and appreciated, but under the pressure of urgent procurement and purchases, something normal for Venture Vanguard, it becomes a significant source of tension.

In Venture Vanguard, many operations are handled in contexts where the client's deadline is already extremely demanding. In this environment, every additional clarification, contractual hesitation, or documentary misunderstanding has bigger consequences. A delay of a few hours or a day may affect production, shipment, or project continuity. This means that intercultural competence is not only about politeness or relationship management, but also about understanding how to accelerate clarity under pressure. Venture Vanguard often has to balance urgency with accuracy. Acting too quickly without sufficient clarification may create problems in documentation, guarantees, ARCCLA allocation, or contractual responsibility. Acting too slowly may compromise the client's project. Decision-making, therefore, becomes a balancing process between speed and precision.

This is one of the reasons why intercultural competence should be understood as an operational capability. It helps employees decide how much explanation is needed, what must be confirmed in writing, when a more direct approach is appropriate, and when more negotiation is unavoidable. It's about using the theoretical knowledge to anticipate how to act with different partners. In high-demand environments, these judgments directly affect efficiency and are valuable for companies operating in intercultural contexts.

4.7 Standardization as an intercultural solution

If this chapter identifies communication, interpretation, and expectation management as major risk areas, then one of the clearest solutions emerging from the internship is standardization. In Venture Vanguard's context, standardization does not eliminate intercultural differences, but it helps create shared reference points that reduce ambiguity and protect the overall workflow.

The importance of clear procedures, documentary precision, and the explicit explanation of requirements such as purchase orders, bank guarantees, contracts, and ARCCLA indicates that standardization may operate as a practical intercultural tool by reducing reliance on assumptions and increasing procedural clarity. However, this should not be understood as a complete solution to intercultural challenges; instead, standardization provides a stable reference point that supports communication, facilitates alignment, and reduces the risk of misunderstanding in cross-border operations.

One important example is the clarification of financial instruments. Specifying that the required guarantee must be a Standby Letter of Credit is a form of standardization. Another example is the use of detailed purchase orders (see 5.2.1) that clearly define article descriptions, quantities, payment terms, INCOTERMS and delivery expectations. A third example is the maintenance of the Export Map, which consolidates information and supports internal and external coordination.

At the same time, standardization must remain flexible enough to adapt to different suppliers and situations. A rigid template cannot solve every negotiation problem. However, the internship experience clearly reinforced that standardization, when combined with intercultural competence, is especially effective. The standardization gives structure, while intercultural competence allows that structure to be explained, negotiated, and adapted without losing clarity.

For Venture Vanguard, standardization appears as one of the most practical responses to intercultural complexity. It supports continuity, improves efficiency and reduces the operational costs of misunderstanding.

In sum, the analysis developed in this chapter demonstrates that intercultural dynamics are not unfamiliar to Venture Vanguard's operations. They are present in supplier communication, contractual negotiation, documentary interpretation, financial terminology, regulatory compliance and urgent decision-making. The internship experience showed that many operational risks emerge from differences in interpretation, expectation, and professional practice across borders. For this reason, intercultural competence should be understood as a concrete operational capability. It helps prevent misunderstandings, supports negotiation, protects the accuracy of documentation and improves the company's ability to respond under pressure. The examples discussed in this chapter show that communication failures in international trade may become operational failures if they are not managed early and clearly. Finally, the chapter also shows that one of the most effective responses to intercultural complexity is standardization combined with adaptability.

Chapter V describes, in further detail, the internship at Venture Vanguard, focusing on evidence from Venture Vanguard's operations - documented incidents, contract negotiations and supplier communications - that illustrate how the principles described throughout Chapter 4 were applied in practice and what measurable effects they had on timing and risk exposure.

Chapter V – Internship at Venture Vanguard and Practical Application

The internship at Venture Vanguard provided me with practical experience in international trade and enabled me to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired during my Master's in Intercultural Studies for Business. Throughout the internship, I developed a deeper understanding of the operational processes involved in procurement, purchasing, logistics coordination and exports, as well as the cultural dynamics that influence international business operations.

The internship lasted 4 months, from February to the end of May 2025. It was carried out five days a week, nine hours per day, from 9 am to 6pm. During the first phase of the internship, the work was carried out directly with the General Manager and the internship supervisor, Ana Rodrigues, which enabled a comprehensive understanding of the company's hierarchy, workflow, and strategic positioning. After this initial period, the internship continued mainly in the Purchases Department, which became the main focus of the practical experience.

This department was particularly relevant due to its central role in Venture Vanguard's workflow. The Purchases Department serves as a connector among several internal and external actors and is involved in activities such as negotiation, contract formalization, purchase order issuance, and communication with suppliers. Because mistakes at this stage may lead to legal, financial, customs, or logistical consequences, the department offered a particularly useful setting for understanding the relationship between operational precision, business communication, and risk management in international trade.

The main area of work combined two dimensions: on the one hand, there was a more strategic and organizational component, including communication materials, internal procedures, and support tools for the company's development; on the other hand, there was a direct operational participation in purchasing processes, supplier contact, documentation control and contract-related tasks. This combination made the internship especially valuable because it connected corporate positioning, operational workflow, and intercultural communication in a concrete business context.

5.1 Tasks performed

During the internship, the tasks undertaken covered both organizational development and operational support, allowing direct contact with various dimensions of Venture Vanguard's activities. These tasks contributed to the company's internal structure and communication and to a better understanding of the workflow, relationship with suppliers and the importance of standardization in international trade operations.

One of the first tasks undertaken during the internship was creating Venture Vanguard's organizational charts. This task was carried out during the first week, after being introduced to the company's hierarchy, OMATAPALO projects and the responsibilities of each team member. The purpose of this task was to clearly represent the company's internal structure and support understanding of how authority, communication, and responsibilities were distributed across the organization. The main output was the set of organizational charts presented below. In terms of competences developed, this task strengthened organizational analysis, observation skills and the ability to translate operational structures into clear visual and written forms.



Figure 1: Hierarchy of Venture Vanguard

Another important task was the creation of Venture Vanguard's LinkedIn page. Since Venture Vanguard was still a relatively new company and had no online presence, the purpose of this task was to increase the company's visibility, credibility and legitimacy in the digital business environment. The page also became a useful tool for contact with

international suppliers and for recruitment activities. As evidence of its impact, the page grew to more than 500 followers in one year (as seen on figure 2) and contributed to contact with international companies through the platform, which later supplied materials for ongoing projects. The competence developed through this task was mainly related to corporate communication, digital positioning and the strategic construction of a trustworthy business image.

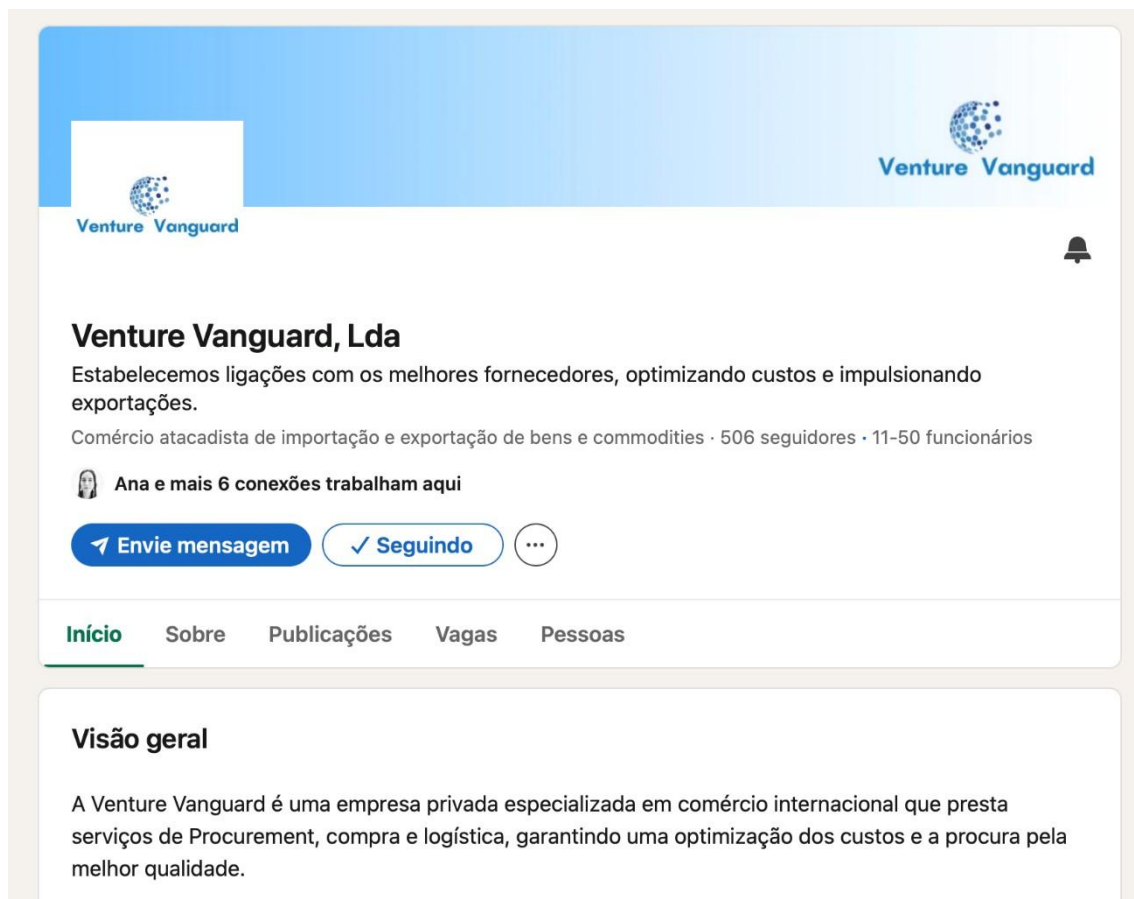


Figure 2: Venture Vanguard's LinkedIn page

Closely connected to this, another task performed was the publication of job openings and support in the recruitment process. The purpose of this work was to help Venture Vanguard address its internal growth needs by attracting suitable candidates for strategic positions. During the internship, job advertisements were prepared and published for the positions of Chief of the Logistics Department, Procurement Operator and Trading Operator. After the applications were received, CVs were screened and a shortlist of five to six candidates was prepared to present to the General Manager. I was also able to conduct the first interview and assist in the second interview.

This task successfully supported the fulfilment of all three managed job openings. This task developed competences related to recruitment communication, candidate assessment, organizational fit analysis and professional interviewing.



Figure 3: Graphic design created to promote a job opening for Venture Vanguard's LinkedIn

A further task involved designing business cards for employees with direct supplier contact. The purpose of this task was clear: to reinforce the company's professional image and facilitate networking in trade fairs, exhibitions and in-person visits to suppliers. As Venture Vanguard increased its presence at industry events, it became necessary to create a communication tool that was visually consistent with the company's identity and functionally useful in business interactions. The output consisted of business cards designed and printed for five employees, and more than 2,000 cards were later distributed. The competence developed through this task was related to corporate identity, branding consistency and professional communication in an international business context.



Figure 4: Back side of the business card designed for Venture Vanguard



Figure 5: Front side of the business card designed for Venture Vanguard

Another highly relevant task was the creation of a formal company presentation in Portuguese and English. The objective was to provide Venture Vanguard with a structured institutional document that could be sent or presented to suppliers to explain the company's operations, its clients, the materials most commonly procured and financial data demonstrating the scale of its purchases and sales. The result of this task was two PowerPoint presentations, briefly displayed below. This task developed competences in intercultural business communication, message clarity, bilingual communication and presenting institutional credibility to international partners.



Figure 6: Cover of Venture Vanguard's presentation PowerPoint developed

The development of the procedures manual was one of the most significant tasks completed during the internship. The purpose of this task was to document the company's hierarchy, mission, workflow and the responsibilities of each department, transforming informal practices into a more structured, standardized and replicable process. As Venture Vanguard operated in international trade and was expanding quickly, a standardized manual was essential for both internal alignment and the training of new employees. The main result was the procedures manual, and the competences developed include process mapping, operational analysis, standardization, written clarity and the practical application of intercultural and organizational knowledge in a concrete business setting.

The development of a compliance declaration for employees was another important task developed during the internship. The objective of this document was to ensure that employees formally acknowledged and committed to the company's internal rules, procedures and regulatory obligations. To draft the document, several compliance declarations from other companies, including OMATAPALO's compliance document, were analysed, and the text was then adjusted through multiple exchanges with the Legal Department. The task resulted in the final compliance declaration, signed by all company employees. The competence developed included compliance awareness, legal document analysis, formal drafting, risk identification and the ability to organize complex legal and operational information into clear internal guidelines.

The internship also included developing a supplier evaluation form to be used across Venture Vanguard's departments. The purpose of this task was to standardize supplier assessment and create a structured tool for monitoring supplier performance from different operational perspectives. The form was designed to be completed by each department involved in the process, as well as by the client, allowing the company to gather broader and more systematic feedback on the suppliers. This resulted in the creation of five Google Forms, one for each relevant department and one for OMATAPALO. This task developed competences in analytical thinking, evaluation design, supplier performance assessment and the standardization of tools that support decision-making.

The image shows a screenshot of a Google Form titled "Avaliação de Fornecedores - Dep. Compras" (Supplier Evaluation - Purchases Department). The form is designed with a light blue header and a white body. The title is in bold black text. Below the title, there is a subtitle "Avaliação de fornecedores pelo Departamento de Compras" (Supplier evaluation by the Purchases Department). A red asterisk indicates a mandatory question. The form features the Venture Vanguard logo, which consists of a blue globe made of hexagons and the company name in blue. Below the logo, there is a section for "Fornecedor *" (Supplier *), with a text input field labeled "A sua resposta" (Your answer). The form is set against a light blue background.

Figure 7: Supplier evaluation form developed for Venture Vanguard (example made for the Purchases Department)

Although the internship included several tasks related to communication, internal structuring, and corporate support, the period spent in the Purchases Department was the most significant part of the practical experience and the area where the operational functioning of Venture Vanguard became most noticeable. It was in this department that it became possible to fully understand, in concrete terms, how international trade works and how international operations depend on precision, timing, negotiation, and coordination between multiple internal and external actors. The

Purchases Department occupies a central position in Venture Vanguard's workflow because it receives information from Procurement, formalizes purchases, ensures the proper issuance of internal and external documents, and maintains direct contact with suppliers. For this reason, the work carried out in this department provided a privileged view of how the company transforms a commercial need into an executable and documented international operation. A substantial part of the internship was therefore dedicated to supporting the Purchases Department's daily activities.

One of the main tasks in this context was issuing purchase orders in PRIMAVERA. The purpose of this task was to formalize the purchase of goods requested by OMATAPALO and ensure that the order accurately reflected all the conditions previously negotiated with the supplier. In practice, this involved the detailed verification of product descriptions, quantities, unit measurements, prices, payment conditions, country of origin, port of destination, delivery deadline and applicable INCOTERMS. The result of this task consisted of the purchase orders issued during the internship as part of the company's regular operations. This task developed competences related to documentary accuracy, attention to detail, procedural consistency and an understanding of how small inconsistencies may later have broader logistical, financial, or customs consequences. Closely connected with the issuance of the purchase orders was the task of reviewing and aligning the information contained in the NEI, the supplier quotation, and the purchase order itself. The objective was to ensure documentary coherence across all stages of the process, reducing the risk of later discrepancies in invoicing, shipping, or customs documentation. This often required adapting the product descriptions in the purchase order to match the supplier's wording. The output of this task was the correction and preparation of more accurate purchase documentation. The competences developed here were strongly linked to documentary control, analytical comparison of documents, and the operational use of language as a risk-prevention tool.

Another key task developed in the Purchases Department was direct contact with suppliers for negotiation, including payment terms, delivery times, and the overall commercial framework of the order. The purpose of this task was to ensure that the purchase conditions were not only commercially acceptable but also operationally viable for Venture Vanguard. This often meant negotiating payment terms that protected the company's financial position while maintaining a constructive commercial

relationship with the supplier. It also involved clarifying deadlines, confirming availability and ensuring that all relevant conditions were properly understood before the formal placement of the order. The output of this task was reflected in the progression of purchasing processes and in the successful alignment between quotations and final order conditions. This task contributed to reducing the likelihood of later logistical, financial, or documentary problems by ensuring that key purchasing conditions were clarified and aligned at an early stage of the process. The competences developed included negotiation awareness, written and oral business communication, expectation management and the ability to communicate under pressure.

Within the same operational context, the internship also involved formally placing orders by email after the commercial and documentary conditions had been confirmed. The purpose of this task was to communicate the final order clearly and professionally, ensuring that the supplier received all necessary references, attachments and instructions to continue the transaction. This required organizing the communication precisely by combining the purchase order, quotation references, delivery instructions and any relevant documentation or logistical requirements. The evidence for this task consisted of formal email communications with orders to the suppliers. The competences developed mainly related to structured business communication, procedural clarity and the ability to produce messages that reduce ambiguity in an international trade environment.

Another task associated with the work done in the Purchases Department was the drafting of a bilingual supply agreement template in Portuguese and English. The objective was to create a contractual tool to support transactions requiring high formalization, especially in higher-value purchases or in situations where the commercial relationship required clearer legal framing. The result was two draft Supply Contracts developed in collaboration with the legal department. The competences developed included bilingual business drafting, contract awareness, legal-operational coordination and a stronger understanding of how contractual language contributes to risk prevention in international trade.

The time spent in the Purchases Department also enabled observation and support of coordination among departments, particularly among Procurement, Logistics, Export and Finance. The purpose of this contact was not a separate, isolated

task; rather, it was a continuous part of the work routine, since the Purchases Department depends on accurate information from Procurement, must communicate with Logistics regarding shipment conditions, relies on Export documentary compliance and affects Finance through payment conditions and guarantees. The output of this experience was a practical understanding of the interdependence between the workflow and the way information circulates within the company. The competences developed were cross-departmental coordination, process awareness and the capacity to understand operations as an integrated chain rather than as isolated functions.

Taken together, these tasks show that the internship combined direct operational participation with strategic organizational contribution.

5.2 Critical incidents

The internship included several situations in which operational tasks revealed intercultural and business challenges more clearly. Identified as “critical incidents”, they illustrate how communication, interpretation and decision-making affected the course of the work carried out.

5.2.1 Purchase and order descriptions and customs risk

During the issuance of purchase orders, the descriptions or unit measurements in the client’s NEI often did not match those in the supplier’s quotation. If the purchase order reproduced vague or inconsistent descriptions, measurements or prices, this could lead to documentary discrepancies, customs issues, and incorrect invoicing. This was not a technical problem. It involved translating between different internal and external ways of describing and measuring the same product, requiring precise wording and shared interpretation across organizations. The purchase order descriptions and measurements were adapted to match the supplier’s quotation while remaining clear enough for customs and internal control purposes. Unit measurements, quantities, and prices were also carefully checked against the client’s documents and needs. This reduced the risk of documentary inconsistencies and improved alignment among the purchase order, supplier invoice and subsequent export documentation.

5.2.2 Negotiating payment conditions with new suppliers

When dealing with new suppliers, one of the first operational challenges was negotiating payment conditions that protected Venture Vanguard's financial position without compromising the commercial relationship. Some suppliers expected full payment upon order confirmation, which created financial pressure and increased risk for Venture Vanguard. Negotiation involved not only commercial reasoning but also the management of expectations shaped by different business practices, levels of trust and perceptions of acceptable risk. Communication with suppliers focuses on negotiating partial advance payments, payment upon delivery or collection of the order, or the opening of trade accounts for credit when possible. The process also involved explaining Venture Vanguard's role in the transaction and the rationale for the payment requirements. The negotiations helped align expectations more realistically and supported more balanced commercial terms for both parties. Negotiation in international trade depends on the ability to explain the logic of the operations while preserving the relationship with the supplier, and financial terms often result in communication issues.

5.2.3 Clarifying contractual clauses with a supplier

During contract negotiations with a Spanish supplier, several clauses were marked for removal or amendment. Some of the proposed changes reflected a clear misunderstanding of the clauses' meaning and purpose, creating a risk of unnecessary tension and delay in the process. This incident showed clearly how language and interpretation affect contracts. Even when both parties are using a shared business language, legal and operational meanings are not always understood in the same way. To resolve this issue, a virtual meeting was organized to clarify the meaning of the contractual points and explain how each clause functioned for both the buyer and the supplier. The misunderstanding was resolved more quickly than it would have been if the explanation had been provided via email alone and the contract progressed with greater alignment between the parties. This went to show that contracts are not only legal documents but also communication tools. Direct clarification prevents escalation when the written interpretation becomes ambiguous for one of the parties.

5.2.4 Drafting the compliance declaration with the Legal Department

The development of the compliance declaration required several rounds of revision with the Legal Department. The document needed to align Venture Vanguard's operations with legal and regulatory requirements while remaining clear and applicable to employees. This incident highlighted the tension between legal precision and practical understanding. In an operational environment, a document may be formally correct yet ineffective if it's not communicated clearly and effectively. Various compliance declarations were reviewed, including OMATAPALO, and a first draft was prepared. The text was then adjusted repeatedly with the Legal Department until the structure, wording and responsibilities were clearly defined in a way that was easily and universally understood. The final declaration was signed by all employees and became part of the company's formal documentation framework.

The lesson learned is that standardization requires negotiation between legal precision and operational use. Clear formal communication is essential to guarantee actual compliance.

5.2.5. Explaining export documentation requirements in advance

When negotiating orders with suppliers, it was necessary to request the price and provide information and documentation: technical data sheets, certificates of conformity, certificates of origin and, in specific cases, even additional certificates (for example, when buying electric cables). If these requirements were not made explicit at the beginning, the process would be delayed by missing documents or by supplier resistance to issuing or providing them. This continuous incident revealed that documentation expectations are not universally shared. What seems routine to one company might be unfamiliar or secondary to another. The documentary requirements were explained as early as possible in supplier communication, along with the payment terms, delivery time and INCOTERMS. This improved awareness and reduced the risk of later delays caused by incomplete documentation mandatory for export. This went to show that anticipation is essential in international trade. Many problems can be reduced by making implicit expectations explicit from the beginning.

5.3 Critical reflection

The internship provided a practical understanding of how international trade depends on communication quality, document precision and the ability to coordinate under pressure. Although the tasks carried out were wide-ranging, they were united by a common operational logic: each stage of the process depends on the reliability of the previous stage, and small misunderstandings may lead to broader consequences.

One of the most important areas of development was communication under pressure. Venture Vanguard operates in a work environment shaped by urgency, complex demands and multiple simultaneous processes. In this setting, communication cannot be understood uniquely as the transmission of information. Communication has to ensure timing, alignment and action. The internship showed that clarity, sequencing and tone are essential when dealing with suppliers, fellow colleagues and legal or operational documentation.

Another major learning outcome was the attention to detail necessary for international trade. The practical work done in the Purchases Department demonstrated that documentary precision is fundamental to the continuity of international operations. Purchase orders, contracts, quotations and certificates are interconnected, and inconsistencies among them may create customs, financial, legal or logistical problems later on. This reinforced the idea that detail is both an administrative concern and a central element of operational reliability.

The internship also developed negotiation awareness and skills. Negotiation was present in price and payment, delivery expectations, documentation responsibilities, contractual clauses and the general framing of the business relationship. This made it clear that negotiation in international trade is bigger than a commercial transaction. It establishes a process for aligning interpretations, responsibilities and acceptable conditions among the different actors involved, who may not begin with the same assumptions.

Another lesson was about dealing with ambiguity. Not all problems had a single, simple correct answer, and many situations required balancing operational urgency with caution, which meant striking a balance within standard procedure while adapting it to specific cases. This was particularly noticeable while dealing with contracts,

documentary requirements and supplier communication. Every supplier has a different cultural background and professional structure; therefore, each process is different. This experience reinforced the importance of having analytical judgment in business contexts where information is often incomplete, and decisions must still be made.

Finally, the internship deepened the understanding of culture as practice rather than stereotype. While the Master's degree provided the theoretical tools to think about intercultural communication, the internship showed that cultural differences appear in practice through business habits, expectations regarding formality, response styles, approaches to documentation and ways of handling trust, time, and risk within a process. This means that culture should not be merely reduced to fixed national characteristics. Culture is better understood as something expressed and negotiated through concrete professional interactions, organisational settings, and individual histories, and it must therefore be interpreted contextually rather than through fixed national categories (Holliday, 2019; Holliday et al., 2021; Dervin & Gross, 2016). Each process and supplier relationship develops within a distinct combination of professional, organizational, commercial, and cultural circumstances.

In this sense, the internship created a strong connection between theory and practice. At Venture Vanguard, intercultural competence is not an abstract skill; it's an operational resource that supports communication, reduces risk and improves coordination.

5.4 Proposed improvement for Venture Vanguard

A concrete improvement that could greatly benefit Venture Vanguard and its operations is the creation and implementation of a standardized checklist to be used before formalizing an order, especially for new suppliers. The internship showed that many delays in the later stages are connected to issues that could be clarified earlier, such as payment terms, documentary requirements, INCOTERMS, bank details, company registration data, export certificates and logistics responsibilities. As of right now, this information is often gathered during the normal progression of communication with the supplier, but if it is centralized in a structured onboarding tool, it would make the process more consistent and reduce avoidable misunderstandings.

This proposal includes a standardized checklist for supplier registration, a document requirements sheet by product type, an informational sheet regarding bank guarantee requirements and INCOTERMS responsibilities. The benefit of this proposal is that it would strengthen standardization before the process becomes time-sensitive. It would reduce the need for repeated clarification, improve coordination between the departments and support a faster integration of new suppliers into Venture Vanguard's workflow. From an intercultural point of view, it would also function as a communication tool, making expectations explicit and reducing the likelihood that different business practices or assumptions could cause issues later in the process.

For a company operating in a high-pressure international environment like Venture Vanguard, a tool like the one presented would contribute directly to operational efficiency, internal alignment, coordination and risk reduction.

CONCLUSION

This internship report set out to examine how intercultural competence contributes to reducing operational risk and enhancing supplier communication within Venture Vanguard's international trade operations. Based on the theoretical discussion developed in the first chapters and on the practical experience gathered during the internship, the report suggests that intercultural competence is not a secondary or abstract dimension of international trade. On the contrary, it functions as a practical operational resource that supports communication, coordination, negotiation and risk prevention in a company that works with suppliers from different countries and, therefore, from different cultural and professional backgrounds, as well as with a client based in Angola.

The analysis of Venture Vanguard's structure and workflow showed that the company operates in a demanding environment characterized by urgency, documentary complexity, logistical coordination and financial sensitivity. In this context, operational risks do not arise only from external instability or technical difficulties. They can also emerge from misunderstandings in communication, different interpretations of contractual and financial terminology, limited familiarity with documentary requirements and misalignment in responsibilities, deadlines and expectations. For this reason, intercultural competence appears to contribute to risk reduction because it helps identify, prevent and manage these points of friction before they develop into wider operational consequences.

The report also showed that intercultural competence improves supplier communication in several practical ways. It helps make requirements clearer, especially regarding quotations, contractual clauses, payment terms, mandatory documentation and export procedures. It also supports the adaptation of communication to different professional and business contexts, allowing Venture Vanguard to negotiate more effectively with suppliers who operate at different rhythms, with different expectations and under different internal procedures. In addition, it strengthens the company's ability to build trust and maintain long-lasting relationships with partners, which is essential in a business model that depends on reliability, responsiveness and repeated interaction with international suppliers. In this sense, intercultural competence supports not only communication, but also continuity in the commercial relationship.

Another relevant point concerns the relationship between intercultural competence and standardization. The internship at Venture Vanguard showed that effective international operations depend not only on individual adaptability, but also on structured procedures that reduce ambiguity across departments and in communication with suppliers. Tools such as the procedures manual, compliance declaration, supplier evaluation forms and more precise contract templates illustrate how standardization can support intercultural work by clarifying expectations and making procedures more consistent. Rather than replacing intercultural competence, standardization complements it by reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings and improving coordination in a multicultural business environment.

From a personal and professional perspective, the internship allowed the practical consolidation of several competences developed in the Master's in Intercultural Studies for Business. It reinforced the importance of communication under pressure, attention to detail, negotiation awareness and the capacity to understand how different suppliers approach business. More importantly, it deepened the understanding that culture should not be interpreted through stereotypes or treated as a fixed national characteristic, but examined through the concrete business practices, identities, expectations, and interaction patterns that shape each international operation. One of the main lessons of the internship was that intercultural competence is not simply about recognizing that differences exist; it is about interpreting them carefully and respectfully and responding to them in ways that improve operational effectiveness and cultivate trust between partners.

In conclusion, the report answers the research question by showing that intercultural competence contributes to reducing operational risk and improving supplier communication within Venture Vanguard by supporting clarity, reducing ambiguity, facilitating negotiation, aligning documentation and expectations, and strengthening business relationships based on trust. In a company whose operations depend on coordination among multiple countries, suppliers, legal frameworks and commercial expectations, intercultural communication remains essential to operational effectiveness and to the successful management of international trade.

Personal reflection

During this internship, I also had the opportunity to grow not only as a student, but also as a professional. Working in a real international business environment helped me understand the importance of responsibility, adaptability, and clear communication in everyday practice. This experience confirmed that the competences developed throughout the Master's degree have direct practical value and will continue to guide my professional path. I was offered a place at Venture Vanguard's Purchases Department to start working right after the internship and will be joining OMATAPALO in September of 2026.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Authorization Declaration

Declaração de Autorização

A **Venture Vanguard Unipessoal, Lda.** declara, para os devidos efeitos, que autoriza a recolha e utilização dos dados observados durante o período de estágio realizado por **Carolina Guedes de Andrade**, aluna do **Mestrado em Estudos Interculturais para Negócios (Intercultural Studies for Business)** do **Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto (ISCAP)**.

A empresa autoriza igualmente a inclusão e tratamento da informação recolhida no respetivo relatório de estágio, exclusivamente para fins académicos, no âmbito da conclusão do referido ciclo de estudos, garantindo que a utilização dos dados respeita os princípios de confidencialidade e proteção da informação aplicáveis.

A presente declaração é emitida para os fins que se mostrem convenientes.

Local: Hadonhos

Data: 06 / 07 / 2026

Pela Venture Vanguard Unipessoal, Lda.

Nome: Ana Luisa Rodrigues
Cargo: Direção Geral
Assinatura: Ana Luisa Rodrigues

VENTURE VANGUARD, UNIPessoal, LDA.
(ZONA FRANCA DA MADEIRA)

INSTITUTO
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MASTER'S IN INTERCULTURAL STUDIES FOR BUSINESS

Intercultural Competence and Operational Risk in International Trade:

An Internship at Venture Vanguard

Carolina Guedes de Andrade

**Internship Report submitted to Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e
Administração do Porto to obtain the Master's degree in
Intercultural Studies for Business, under the supervision of
Professor
Sandra Patrícia Marques Ribeiro**

